

SERMON: DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: GEOFF CHADWICK: 26/7/2026 OS17a
SUNDAY BWEWEEN 24 AND 30 JULY
ARE YOU A THESUARUS, A MARGARET OR A FISH?

Matthew 13.44-58

⁴⁴ ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷ ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ ‘Have you understood all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ ⁵² And he said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’ ⁵³ When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place. ⁵⁴ He came to his home town and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?’ ⁵⁷ And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honour except in their own country and in their own house.’ ⁵⁸ And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

Today’s parables by Jesus have been used by Matthew to describe the early church of about AD 90.

In this church there are thesauruses, Margarets and fish all gathered in a synagogue!

What am I talking about?

The Greek word for *treasure* is *thesaurus*. (Hence a treasury of words.)

The Greek word for *pearl* is *Margaret*.

The Greek word for fish is missing but implies fish of all kinds.

And the Greek word for *caught* is *synagogousae*.

I could be reading too much into the text, but these words intrigue me. Could it be that there were converts in the church who had sold all they had for the sake of the church; or given up everything for the sake of the beauty of the gospel;

churches full of a radical gathering of people with vast differences – some seen to be good and some seen to be bad?

Let's take a closer look.

Treasure Hidden in the Field

In Jesus's day there were no banks, so the most common way of keeping your money safe was to bury it in the ground. This is the original meaning of buried treasure. So finding money hidden in a field is not an unusual idea. What's extraordinary in this parable, is that the finder buys up all the neighbouring property. It's a bit of a property Boom!

The finder realises there more to be found. The person has had a glimpse of something marvellous and is expecting more. It's as if just a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven is enough to convince you that there must be more. It's a reminder to the early church, and us today that glimpses of the kingdom should spur us on. Once we've discovered the goodness of God, we want more. Not because we are greedy, but because that is where our treasure is. Unlike Gollum in the Lord of the Rings, *My precious*, is not a golden ring to be grasped, but an overwhelming joy in the presence of God.

I need a thesaurus, to find the right word to describe it (bad pun), and maybe you can't describe it either. Even so finding God's treasure, in a paradoxical way is discovering that we ourselves are God's treasure. Just imagine, the person sitting next to you is God's treasure! By the way there's many more to be found!

A Pearl of Great Value

Hello to all you Margarets out there! You are Pearls of great value! Pearls are hard to come by. In Jesus' day free divers would have risked their lives to find them. Not all pearls are valuable, but the one of great price is particularly well formed and beautiful.

The merchant is a seeker. The merchant has been seeking for the Kingdom of Heaven amongst pearls of all kinds. Finally, he find the one- the pearl more valuable than any other pearl. Could this be the pearl of the Gospel message? Perhaps so.

That in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus we now know that God's love is indestructible. Other "loves" may fail but God's love is priceless.

How wonderful it is that we and those who have gone before us can rest in this love. There is no pearl more valuable!

A Fishing Net called Synagogue

Somehow or other, all of us here today are caught up in the fishing net we call the church of God. This net called *Synagogue*, has gathered us in whether we like each other or not.

Synagogue, as you know is the word the Hebrew sometimes used for "gathering" or "congregation". We Christians like to use the word "church".

Now there are good and bad fish caught up in this net. Fish of all kinds; and every now and then we evaluate each other. We, who are in the net, endeavour to separate out the good and the bad. Invariably this means that all the fish similar to "me" must be "good". If the fish is unlike "me" it must be "bad".

But you know there is a problem, and it's spelt out in the parable itself.

Those trapped in the net are not the sorters!

It is The angels[who] will come out and separate the evil from the righteous

(Mtt 13:49, NRSV)

It's important to remember that one of the attractions of the early church was its inclusivity.

Breaking all the strict social norms of society, men, women and children were able to congregate. The social class structure was ignored, and different ethnicities were brought

together. It's remarkable when you think about it, and I think it testifies to the great treasure of the Gospel message. In case you were unaware, the culture of the day prohibited the sharing of food between people of different races and social status. Christians however, most powerfully and most radically, shared common bread and common wine at eucharist. Just remember that when you receive communion this morning you are engaging in a radical, revolutionary act. You are eating with all kinds of weird fishes!

Most strikingly, the Christian writer Tertullian in 197AD, recorded the Pagan Roman response to meeting Christians as:

See how these Christians Love one-another
(*Apologeticus* 0.5.4, 0.5.6)

On my good days, I know this to be true, because many times I have received that love.

On my bad days, I wonder if we've all got it wrong and are not all bad fish after all!

Then again, the Gospel is not just about basking in God's goodness. It's also about brokenness and forgiveness. It's about admitting one's mistakes and it's about becoming a new creation by the grace of God.

So are you a thesaurus, a Margaret or a fish?

Perhaps we're all a bit of each!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.