

Treasure
Matthew 13:44-46

Wayne Eberly
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The parables Jesus told are memorable. Captivating, challenging, and interesting, the parables relate to the modern-day life of the people to whom Jesus told them. It is of great importance to notice these parables translate remarkably well into the world in which we live. So, I thought I would make up a parable that connects to something in our own little world of Westerly, Rhode Island, with the hope of connecting it to the parables Jesus told about hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. My parable is about a Carousel.

The inspiration for this parable comes from the Watch Hill Carousel. Watch Hill is a unique part of Westerly, home to mansions right out of lifestyles of the rich and famous, with a stunning lighthouse, a pristine beach that always seems to be rolling with waves for swimming and surfing, seaside stores that entice you to buy t-shirts, souvenirs, and knickknacks, restaurants that invite you to come and enjoy simple sandwiches or fine cuisine, an ice cream shop you that cranks out cones from early morning until late at night, and the famous Watch Hill Carousel. Believed to made in 1867 by Andrew Christian and the Charles W.F. Dare Co. of New York City, legend has it that a traveling carnival brought the carousel to Watch Hill in 1883 and for some unknown reason abandoned it. It is said to be the oldest continuously operating carousel in the United States. This treasure has survived disasters for over 135 years including the 1938 Hurricane's devastating effects on Watch Hill, Rhode Island.

A visit to Watch Hill in the summertime is not complete without a walk over to the carousel, where you see the happiest faces of the cutest kids mounted on impressive steeds. Laughter fills the air as the children make loop after loop after loop. A feature of the carousel is a little corner where a ring pops out. If you reach over from your mount and stretch your arm out, and have a firm grip, you can grab one of the rings. It is those little rings, maybe brass rings, that inspire my parable that is my humble addition to the wonderful words of Jesus about treasure and the pearl of great price. Here goes...

Which of you, riding on a carousel, if you saw the brass ring was within your grasp, would not reach out and stretch your hand until you could grab hold of it? And when you have that brass ring, you rejoice, for you are happy. And you ride that carousel over and over again, and every time you grab the brass ring, you remember how happy you are. You grab the ring when you are five, six, and seven...even when you are nine, ten, and eleven. And every time you grab the ring you are happy.

But one day, maybe when you are sixteen, going on seventeen, you notice that some of the other riders are no longer reaching out for the brass ring. They are starting to grab other prizes, other treasures. They are grabbing things like report cards filled with straight A's and clothes with all the right emblems and athletic abilities that help them rise above the crowd at school and cars that make them really cool. And you look at your brass ring, and it doesn't shine like it did when you were five, six and seven. So, you start reaching for the things like the others. And when you grab those rings, it makes you happy.

But one day, maybe when you are twenty something, or thirty, clothes and cars and letter jackets and report cards, they are not quite as exciting as when you were in your teens. And you notice that others have moved on and they are now grabbing a mortgage, a house, a job with a fancy title, a career that is on the rise. So you start grabbing for those same things. And it makes you happy.

But one day, maybe in your 50s...and I'll let you fill in the blanks...and one day when you are in your 70s...and year by year, decade by decade, you make the same circle, and the things you grab for might get bigger, might even get better, but no matter how much bigger and no matter how much better, there always comes a time when you ask, "Is that all there is?" And you see someone grabbing after something new and so you join them in the grabbing. And when you grab what everyone else is grabbing, you are happy. For a while...And then maybe as your life is winding down, as your life is coming to an end, you go back and look at all the things you grabbed, things that made you happy at five and six and seven, things that made you happy as a teen, things that got you through your 20s and 50s and 60s and 70s, and you look at everything you grabbed and a scary thought comes to you. "Is that all there is?" I grabbed a whole bunch of things, and they made me happy...for a while. But is that all there is? Is there something else to reach for, something else I can grab? That is all I know, this going around in a circle and grabbing whatever catches my eye, whatever others are grabbing. But is that all there is? And as you ask that question you notice that the laughter on the carousel isn't as loud as you remember it when you were a kid. Then one little brass ring brought squeals of delight. Now big-ticket items...even big-ticket items are kind of boring. Is that all there is? Is the treasure I have spent my time grasping after, is that the real treasure that life holds. Or have I been deceived?

The laughter on your carousel begins to die out. The noise fades away. It is pretty disheartening to ride and ride and ride in circles and realize you have never really gained the happiness you were trying to grab. That kind of silence is deafening. "Is that all there is?"

As you begin to feel trapped on your carousel that is spinning in endless and even pointless circles, you hear a sound that you remember from your childhood. You hear the sound of music, the sound of beautiful music. You hear the sound of joy. You hear the sound of happiness. And you realize there is another carousel just a stone's throw away. This carousel is also filled with riders surrounded with all the treasures their carousel has to offer. You leave your carousel and you go to see this other carousel, this carousel filled with such wonderful sights and sounds.

The first thing you notice is that no one is grabbing on this carousel. Instead, there is a man, a man filled with kindness and compassion, and he is giving out gifts. Every time someone passes him on the carousel he reaches out and gives them gifts, gifts that are beautiful, gifts that are precious, gifts that are priceless. Sometimes he gives material gifts like houses and cars and definitely clothes and food. But most of the time, in fact nearly all the time, he is giving gifts that are not material. He is giving gifts like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. He is constantly giving out the gift of forgiveness. When the riders who pass him are crying tears of sadness, he wipes their tears. When they are sad, he comforts them. When they are lonely, he stands by their side. When they hurt, he heals. Unlike your carousel, that carousel where people grew tired of certain gifts, or wanted bigger and better gifts, the gifts this man gives satisfy. And the people come around for them over and over and over again. These gifts bring life. These gifts bring healing. These gifts bring hope. These gifts make life meaningful. These gifts give life purpose.

As you are watching this, you realize the giving never ends. The people on this carousel are showered with gifts, abundant gifts given without hesitation, gifts given from a giver who is gladhearted. But you also notice, no one is weighed down with their gifts. No one is collecting all their gifts. You are shocked. Isn't that what you do on a carousel. As you grab brass rings, as you grab new cars, as you grab bigger and better things, you accumulate them, you hold on to them, you hoard them, you guard them, you protect, you would even fight for them. But this other carousel, as soon as someone is given a gift, they do the most amazing thing. They share the gift with others. As soon as the kind man wipes a tear from their eyes, they in turn wipe the tear from another. As soon as he comforts them in their loneliness, they comfort another. As soon as he comes alongside them and gives friendship and support, they do the same for someone else. And even when they receive tangible gifts, houses, food, money...even when they receive tangible gifts, almost immediately they are looking for ways they can share that gift. You realize, with quite a bit of disappointment, these folks, who are not grasping and grabbing, have received a treasure beyond anything your grasping and grabbing could every get for you.

Oh, I could probably turn up the heat and start preaching about how people have missed the chance and grabbed hold of worthless things and chased the wrong dreams and spent their life pursuing worldly treasures, but someone else is going to have to preach that sermon. You see, when you are preaching a parable about treasure and you are trying to connect it to the parables Jesus told about treasure, I would foul the whole thing up if I made the parable about judgment and missed opportunity and wasted time. You see, what Jesus tells us is that when you realize there is another carousel that is filled with life and laughter and love, there is nothing in all creation to stop you from getting on that carousel. You are not trapped on another carousel. You are not barred from entrance or banned from riding.

The parables Jesus tells about treasure are parables that invite you to grab hold of that treasure that is so freely given. The parables Jesus tells about the kingdom of heaven being like treasure are parables that invite you to give yourself to the king of that kingdom, and in giving yourself to the king and to his kingdom you will find the greatest joy and deepest meaning life has to offer.

Today is not a day of judgment. Today is a day of joy. Today is an invitation to grab hold of the treasure Jesus offers. I love how one pastor retells the parable about the pearl of great price.

And when we find Jesus, it costs us everything. He has happiness, joy, peace, healing, security, eternity, everything. So we say, "I want this pearl. How much is it?"

"Well," the seller says, "it's very expensive."

"But how much?" we ask.

"Well, a very large amount."

"Do you think I could buy it?"

"Oh, of course. Everyone can buy it."

"But didn't you say it was very expensive?"

"Yes."

"Well, how much is it?"

"Everything you have," says the seller.

We make up our minds. "All right, I'll buy it," we say.

"Well, what do you have?" he wants to know. "Let's write it down."

“Well, I have ten thousand dollars in the bank.”

“Good—.-ten thousand dollars. What else?”

“That’s all. That’s all I have.”

“Nothing more?”

“Well, I have a few dollars here in my pocket.”

“How much?”

We start digging. “Well, let’s see—thirty, forty, sixty, eighty, a hundred, a hundred twenty dollars.”

“That’s fine. What else do you have?”

“Well, nothing. That’s all.”

“Where do you live?” He’s still probing.

“In my house. Yes, I have a house.”

“The house, too, then.” He writes that down.

“You mean I have to live in my camper?”

“You have a camper? That, too. What else?”

“I’ll have to sleep in my car!”

“You have a car?”

“Two of them.”

“Both become mine, both cars. What else?”

“Well, you already have my money, my house, my camper, my cars. What more do you want?”

“Are you alone in this world?”

“No, I have a wife and two children. ...“

“Oh, yes, your wife and children, too. What else?”

“I have nothing left! I am left alone now.”

Suddenly the seller exclaims, “Oh, I almost forgot! You yourself, too! Everything becomes mine—wife, children, house, money, cars—and you too.”

Then he goes on. “Now listen—I will allow you to use all these things for the time being. But don’t forget that they are mine, just as you are. And whenever I need any of them you must give them up, because now I am the owner.”

That’s how it is when you are under the ownership of Jesus Christ.¹

When you have Jesus, you have everything. And the only thing he wants is for you to use everything you have to help build his kingdom. To share in the kingdom of heaven, that is the pearl of great price.

¹ Juan Carlos Ortiz, Disciple, pages 34, 35