

Series: **EVERYDAY THINGS** - June 14, 2009

**PEARLS**  
**Matthew 13:44-46**

**I. INTRO**

- A. Did anyone hear the news about the two paintings that were donated to a downtown Goodwill secondhand store? When they came in, someone stuck them in a shopping cart for the store manager to assess and price. The manager noticed the signatures, checked them out—and found out that they had been painted by Federico del Campo, a well-known Peruvian artist. Last Tuesday CTV Toronto reported that the paintings were sold at auction for over \$150,000! I know, I know—some of you are going to be cruising garage sales for the next two years!
1. One of the greatest treasures ever found was discovered off the Carolina coast back in the 80's.  
It was 275 foot steamship, the USS Central America, lost in a hurricane in September, 1857.  
It was carrying about 15 **tons** of gold mined in the California gold strike.  
-A group called the Columbus-America Discovery Group found it in 1987—and since then it's been called, **Ship of Gold**. One gold ingot weighed 80 pounds—and sold for \$8 million! The entire treasure is estimated at \$100-150 million dollars!  
Of course, it **cost** them about \$125 million to **find** the treasure. Just kidding!
  2. Just about everyone fantasizes about finding some kind of treasure somewhere! People gamble, play the lottery—because they think they're going to find...a **treasure**. People try out for **American Idol** because they think...they **are** a treasure. People haul their junk to the **Antiques Roadshow** convinced that the old painting they found in their basement is worth \$150,000! When we hear the word **treasure**—our eyes gleam. We think of gold ingots, diamonds, rubies and emeralds!
- B. Jesus used the image of treasure—to describe a Kingdom that is largely invisible to us. A Kingdom—a **spiritual realm** that Jesus said would eventually engulf and eclipse all the kingdoms on this planet. It was the place of healing; power; the presence and Mission of God.

-Jesus believed so deeply in this Kingdom that would restore **everything**—that He willingly sacrificed His life to bring it to us. And now it's my turn—and your turn—to believe and to lay everything on the line. That's what these stories are about. Laying **everything** on the line. **Everything**.

Jesus says, "This Kingdom...it's powerful. It's amazing! It's bigger than you'd ever dare to dream. It starts here—and it doesn't look like much—but it stretches to every border of reality—and into eternity—and way beyond **anything** you'd ever hope to be a part of. It's like...well, like a treasure someone discovers. It's like...well, like a diamond purchaser finding the most breathtaking gem this planet has to offer up!"

-And we have to decide, to be totally honest, if Jesus is drumming up business—looking for investors. Or, if as He says, this Kingdom is the **Treasure** of all treasures.

## II. ON THE SURFACE...

A. Jesus called up more images and illustrations to describe the Kingdom of God than He did for any other topic. We see this especially in Matthew 13 where Jesus uses a flurry of images to describe the power and expansion of this Kingdom in the world—and in the hearts and lives of people. He says, “This Kingdom—the power and influence of God—when it gets into people’s hearts—is like a seed in soil. The potential for amazing growth and fruitfulness is there—but what happens will depend on the kind of soil in their hearts. Because, see, things like disinterest, or fear, or the busyness of everyday life can choke what God wants to grow!

-He said, “Right now, what God is doing seems small and concealed—like a seed; but what it grows into will be powerful and life-giving—way bigger than you can imagine! But then Jesus shifts gears—and uses the images we’re talking about this morning. Let’s read it:

**“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.” (Matthew 13:44 NLT)**

1. In Jesus’ culture, there were no banks or safes or safety deposit boxes—so people had to figure out how to protect their valuables and heirlooms. For example, if someone sold a piece of property—most of the people in the area would know about it—including thieves!

-Israel, over the previous 600 years, had been conquered by Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome—and people carried off into captivity. When people realized that invasion was inevitable, they would wrap up jewelry, money and other valuables—intending to come back some day and reclaim them. For most, that never happened. They were either killed—or captured—and the treasure remained buried.

-Jesus says, what if a guy was out working someone else’s property—digging around--and **stumbles across** a treasure like this in a field. He’s heard about things like this happening. He pulls out this bundle wrapped in rotting rags. As he opens it, his heart is beating fast. Inside is a cache of gold and silver coin—and he gasps! This is more than he’s ever even seen! His mind is racing—wondering what to do.

-He can’t just **take** it—that would be stealing. But he **could** buy the field—which would include anything on it or in it. But the price-tag is steep. It will cost **everything**. Like, this isn’t just emptying out his bank account. This is selling **every single possession he has!** And he is **overjoyed** to do that—cause, see, he **knows** what this treasure is worth! And then he will have a field—**and** a treasure!

2. The next scenario is different. Let's read it:

**“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!” (Matthew 13:44-46 NLT)**

This image is *much* more intentional. The person is treasure-hunter--a jewel merchant who specializes in pearls.

- When Jesus mentioned **pearls**, **everyone's** ears perked up. Most had never seen one—and none, including Jesus—had ever handled one—mainly because they were the most valuable of all jewels.

Pearls in that culture were considered more valuable than diamonds in ours. Only the elite of the elite owned them. Legend tells us that Cleopatra had a pair of priceless pearl earrings. The expense and rarity of pearls in that culture had to do with both the difficulty in finding natural pearls—and the danger in diving for them on the bottom of the ocean.

-So—this pearl broker probably traveled through the coastal cities on behalf of extremely wealthy clients--looking for the biggest and best pearls. And **one** day in a little coastal town, he finds a pearl that is bigger, and more perfect in its color and shape than anything he has ever seen—**anywhere**. But the person who owns it knows pearls too. And the price is stiff. To buy it, he will have to go home and sell **everything** he has. But thought, “Don't buy it—it's too much” never even occurs to him. In fact, he tries his best to stay calm and not let his shaking hands betray his excitement. This is the **chance of a lifetime!**

-Jesus said that to buy this pearl—this **treasure**—he sold **everything he had**.

3. I bought this diamond for Lori on our 30<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. I got a **great** deal on it. Do we have any gemologists here who can determine the color, clarity, carats, and cost of this incredible stone? I **do** suspect that it's a fake—because they had a cardboard boxful of rubies, emeralds and sapphires—all the same size and cut! What do **you** think—**genuine or fake?** Why would you think it's **fake?** Well, probably because I don't have—and never **will** have—and could never even **steal** enough money to buy a stone like this—**right?**

-Jesus says that this Kingdom—this sphere of God's perfect leadership that is **under the surface** of life and eternity is priceless; that **if you see the treasure**—it's worth laying everything--**everything** on the line for. But, for the most part, it's hidden.

- B. We as a culture—are people who dance on the surface. We pick up bits and pieces of this and that. “Ooh...**that** looks good. And what about **that!** **Gotta get me one of those**. And if we're not careful—that's where we can live. I mean, if **we'd** have been the one in the field in Jesus' story—we probably would've just singed a path through it. We don't have time to stop and dig around. I probably would've never seen beyond the bugs and weeds and mice.

-And **oysters?** Have you ever opened up an oyster? They're gross and slimy inside! Who'd want to dig through all of that to find a pearl?

-Sometimes all we get from what Jesus is up to in this world is a surface ride. Steeples. Pews. Sleepy, uptight people. A book 1100 pages long. Sweaty preachers on TV who yell and pray. A bloody religious past detailed in history books. An internet video, *Zeitgeist*—that says that the whole thing is myth.

-But running *under* the surface, for those who will stop and look—is *life*. Real life, power to live, love that runs hot and deep. And the question is—*Is that what you believe--really?* Is this life Jesus offers *real*—or, like this diamond—too big to be genuine?

### III. BUT UNDER THE SURFACE...

- A. The common thing in these two images Jesus used—a treasure in a field and a priceless pearl—is that the people who found them immediately recognized their value—and laid *everything* on the line to acquire them.

-Our struggle—2000 years removed from Jesus—is not *believing* what He said about the extreme importance and value of what God is up to in this world; it's *living* that way. Let me give you a *for instance*. Let's say that I said publicly that my wife, Lori, was the most important person in my life. That she's not just the love of my life, but my best friend and traveling companion through life.

-But then she begins to see that just about *everything* comes before her. Work. Fishing. TV. Me. I can *say* she's the most important person in my life. I can even *believe* that I'm actually telling the truth. But if my values and actions aren't aligned with that, it will first hurt her. If I still say the right words—but nothing changes—it will ultimately destroy my credibility in her life—and ultimately obliterate our relationship.

1. Let's talk about this Kingdom Jesus taught. At the core, it's about God making *everything* right that's gone wrong because of sin and rebellion. It's about God taking his rightful place as King—as Lord of all. And that's a fantastically *good* thing.

-See, through Jesus we have a clear picture of God. Through creation, we can see that He's powerful beyond belief. We can see that what He makes is incredibly good—perfect. We can see that His brilliance and majesty is way more than *any* person could ever begin to comprehend. That He does creation so effortlessly—it *looks* like it just happens.

-But in Jesus, we look into the very *heart* of God. This God is humble. He comes to his creation by being born in a barn and laid in a manger. This is a God who forgives people who beat Him half to death, ridicule Him, slap Him around and humiliate Him.

-Through Jesus we see a God who washes people's feet—does the job no one else will lower themselves to do. This God has compassion on people in pain. This is a God who offers grace to people who don't really even want *Him*—just what He offers. This is a God who freely welcomes back those who betray Him when following Him gets dangerous.

-This isn't a God who just buys us lunch and gives us nice gifts; this is a God who **personally** pays the price for the horrible things we do—but won't admit. It's a God who allows his hands and feet to be nailed to a cross—knowing He will die, but also knowing that **we** will live!

-And this is a God who **relentlessly** and **personally** pursues a relationship with us—even when we're uninterested and apathetic—and one of 6.7 billion people on this planet.

2. Just **imagine** a leader like that—and what it would be like to live under and work with Someone like that. Someone without limitations. Someone who is absolutely just and fair—and yet absolutely merciful and gracious. Someone who doesn't have to **guess** what's going on in the world—but **knows**.

Someone who controls all of history—and is able to bring it **all** together to a whole, peaceful **amazing** ending no one would **ever** expect. Someone who never snaps, never blunders, never "mis-speaks." Can you imagine living under **perfect leadership**?

3. Jesus taught us to pray, **Your kingdom come, your will be done—on earth, as it is in heaven**. In other words, "Lord, make **up there** come **down here!**" Let's just dream about that for a few minutes.

\*Imagine a world where hatred is a thing of the past. Where people groups who have been hating and killing each other for hundreds of years—forgive, offer peace and tear down blood stained walls.

\*Imagine a world where all the injustice and oppression is a thing of the past. There's no more slavery, no more child prostitution—no more bullies shoving people off the property and out of their homes—taking money simply because they can.

\*Imagine a world where **every** child is safe to play in the streets and walk to school. Imagine a world where no children starve—or get their meals from garbage dumps. Imagine a world where there **is** no such thing as an unwanted pregnancy—where children never get neglected or abused by parents too drunk to care.

\*Imagine a world where aircraft carriers carry food, clothing and medicine—not planes with warheads. Imagine a world where all the ships, tanks and missiles get forged into John Deere tractors and combines?

\*Imagine a world where no families are divided and haunted by pain, where there's grace and forgiveness—where couples are united with intense love and loyalty.

\*Imagine a marketplace that is dominated by value and excellence—not driven by greed and the bottom line. Think of a world where everyone works doing something meaningful—and is managed by someone who actually loves them.

\*Imagine a world where every man, woman and child has at least **one** friend—and is truly loved by more people than they can even count.

\*Imagine a world where places like Sick Kids Hospital are emptied out; where AIDS, heart disease, cancer, brain tumors, and diabetes are distant history.

\*Imagine a world where rehab centers close—because there's no need; where anyone can watch a movie anywhere—and not feel dirty; imagine a world where porn sites and drug dealers and casinos close down—because there's no longer any money in that kind of business. Imagine a world where poverty ended long ago—because the rich got such a **kick** out of giving their money away?

\*And imagine a totally unpolluted world—where people no longer rape and plunder the earth to get what they want—and leave a mess of rust and filth behind? Imagine being able to go out on Lake Ontario, or on the Niagara River—or the Mississippi River—or the Yangtze River—and scoop out a cup of water and drink it—without worrying that you'll glow in the dark!

\*And imagine a world that is totally, thoroughly, **crazy** in love with the God of the Universe. A world where **In God We Trust** is real—not just words on money. Imagine a world where relationships are whole and honest; where transparency and vulnerability is safe. Where people don't judge and slander others. Imagine a world where **love wins! All the time! Every day!**

4. Friends—**that's** the Kingdom of God. That's what Jesus died to accomplish—starting in the hearts of sinners—radically transforming them—and moving from **there** to the world. **That's** what the disciples signed on for. That's why God showed up on this planet. That's what God's original creation was supposed to look like; **that's** what God is building even as we meet--and **that's** where the leadership and Kingship of God is taking things. And **that's** what we're called to be a part of every day. That's Jesus' vision. And—make no mistake about this--it **will be accomplished!**

-Can you understand why Jesus would say, "It's like this guy—who's sweating, digging around in the dirt and weeds and bugs and mess—and stumbles on a buried treasure! And he's out there dancing with joy! And he **gladly** sells everything to get it—cause **this is his chance!** And why, when the merchant sees it—he knows in an instant that **this is his chance** to purchase the treasure of a lifetime. But it will cost **everything!**

- B. Jesus told his followers to **count the cost**. Is anyone here rich enough to go around and buy stuff without ever looking at the price tag? Even if you were—you wouldn't do that. Jesus never deceived people about the price of following Him. He was very careful to tell people, "You need to think this through. You need to count the cost—just like someone building a home would do a cost estimate to see if they could actually **finish** what they're building." In fact, he said these words in front of a crowd one day:

Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed? (Luke 9:23-25 NLT)

1. We’re smart people. At least we **think** we’re smart sometimes. And we **think**, “Well, I **would** like to follow Jesus.

You know, get heaven, have Him heal my body when I’m sick, fix my relationships, comfort me when I’m sad, direct me when I’m confused—bring meaning to my life and take me to Heaven in a blaze of glory when I die. Hey...maybe I can have that **and** hang onto everything else—too!” Doing that is a little like getting just a **little bit** pregnant!  
Jesus said **If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it.**

-There’s a lot of fear, isn’t there? Price tags are **always** scary. You wonder, “What will Jesus ask me to give? I mean, is He going to wring all the juice out of me and leave nothing? And what will **others** think? Will He ask me to live some weird, prudish life—steal all my fun? I mean, choosing to follow Jesus and let Him be Lord is like giving God a blank check!”

-I guess this really comes right back around to your view of who God is—and what Jesus was about. Did Jesus **take** life wherever He went—or **give** life? See, what Jesus offers us is a relationship. Paul, an early leader compares this relationship between Jesus and His followers to the relationship between a husband and wife. Is it possible to build a satisfying, meaningful marriage relationship without investing **everything** in it? If you’ve figured out how to do that—let me know, because I don’t think it’s possible. In fact, it’s impossible to build **any** strong relationship or friendship by mostly taking and never giving.  
-Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God—the leadership and rule of God—is a **treasure** you find, and then you invest **everything** in.” There’s no way you can make your own way—or buy your own way into it. But you lay everything on the line **for** it.

2. Jesus only used pearls in one other illustration. It’s a curious statement in the Sermon on the Mount. Kind of a stand-alone, actually. He says:

**"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces." (Matthew 7:6 TNIV)**

-I’m not sure it was Jesus’ intention for us to figure out **who** the dogs and pigs are. The bottom line here is no one in their right mind treats what they **treasure** with contempt!

You **treat** what you treasure most with great care.

-There’s a story in the Bible that I think summarizes this. It’s found in Genesis--at the beginning of the Bible with the grandsons of Abraham. In that culture parents passed down to their children something called the **birthright**. It was

the blessing of God—typically given to the oldest child. Having the blessing of God passed to you by your parents was **huge**. Well, Isaac and Rebekkah only had two children; twins named Jacob and Esau. Esau was a big, hairy hunter kind of guy—whose idea of a vacation would be moose-hunting in NWT. Jacob? Not so much. He liked to hang around Mom and cook, make fudge. Things like that.

-So, one day Esau has been out in the bush on a hunt—and comes in **famished!** Jacob has just made a whole pot of stew—and the smell is wafting out all over the camp. Esau's stomach is screaming for attention. So he asks for some stew—and Jacob says, "For a price. Your birthright!" And that day Esau becomes the poster boy for instant self-gratification--known through history as this big dumb hairy guy who sold his family **blessing** for a bowl of stew! A **bowl of stew!!**

3. Seems crazy, doesn't it? "Let's see—**bowl of stew—family birthright**. Hmm! This is a **hard** one! What shall I choose?" You want to say, "Come on, you big dumb bean eater! You've been out in the woods too long!" -But Esau wasn't the last person to trade something invaluable for a quick fix. I've done it—and I'll bet you have too. Every single day in our world people by the **millions** choose a bowl of stew over their future. It's the choice between now and the future. It's the choice between ultimate joy and meaning—and a quick fix. It's a choice between a band-aid and healing. People who think, "You know—marriage seems **so** far away..." People who think, "I'm in **so** much pain—I need relief **now!**" People who think, "I'm not getting what I want out of this relationship—it's over."
  
4. And it's **possible** to treat the Kingdom, the leadership of God—Jesus' plan to restore everyone and everything back to our original glory—with contempt. It's not that we don't want to go to Heaven. It's not that we don't love Jesus. It's not that we don't appreciate truth, forgiveness and grace. Not at all. It's just that **our** treasure in the field, **our** invaluable pearl—is something else. -And that is at the root of the inconsistency we see between followers of Jesus. Some followers lay **everything** on the line. They are transformed—and, though they have their moments, passionate, flat-out commitment is what you see. These are the people who, over the past 2000 years, have returned love for hate; who have found joy in the middle of their sadness. There are people who face the same problems and struggles as everyone else—but **overcome**. They are people with stamina, compassion—they have the courage to **try** generosity and find that giving **is** more blessed than receiving.
 

-But there's a contrast. Others who claim to follow Jesus use His Name quite freely—and even know their Bibles and keep their noses clean. But when it comes to what God is doing, words like **disregard, disinterest, distraction—**and **distance** come to mind. And the likely explanation? Well, their treasure is somewhere else. That's why their **heart** isn't in following Jesus. The question is, have they **ever** chosen to follow Jesus?
  
5. In Jesus' story, the man who found the treasure and the merchant who found the pearl traded **everything** for them. **Gladly!** Truth is that with us, sometimes, the treasure of what God wants to do gets replaced. Sometimes

with work. Sometimes with the blitz of activities our kids are in. Money—acquiring it, worrying about it, and spending it. Sometimes in our loneliness—we toss Jesus’ Kingdom and leadership over board for the next relationship.

“I need something I can **hold** and **squeeze!**”

-See, the underlying thought in this is, “Well, I’ve prayed the sinner’s prayer, I’ve been forgiven—I mean, eternal life is based on grace, not performance, right?”

And we use the grace and kindness and love and sacrifice of Jesus as an excuse for contempt—choosing and living for another treasure.

-It’s funny; Jesus’ comment on throwing your treasure to the pigs comes with a warning;

**“...If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:6b TNIV)**

When you fail to discern what is important and what isn’t—and your trade what is invaluable for some stupid bowl of stew—that has a way of biting you.

Not only do you lose the treasure —what you **traded** it for turns on you.

6. How do you know whether this has happened? Jesus said that where your treasure it—**that’s where your heart will be**. And you can tell **where** your heart is by where you tend to get extravagant with your energy and resources. This is not about how much time you spend at the church. This is about the **reason** why you do what you do—whether it’s coaching soccer, helping a friend, or teaching kids in school, or even how much gas and electricity you use. All of life is spiritual—when we understand that God’s goal is to make **everything** right—and uses His people to do it.
- And I’ll tell you the bottom line. It’s whether or not you are willing to absolutely and completely submit to the Leadership—the **Lordship** of Jesus Christ. Your mouth. Your ego. Your temper. Your time. Your body. Your computer. Your car. Your home. Your bank accounts. **Everything**.
- What’s the treasure worth? Well, it’s worth **everything**. This treasure is the most important thing in the universe. There will come a day when it will be clear that it was the only thing that ever really counted. And if you don’t think it is--well, you’ll have to choose another treasure that you believe is worth laying **everything** on the line for. Living for. And Dying for.

#### IV. WORTH LIVING FOR...AND DYING FOR

- A. As I studied these stories, one famous writer identified the man who found the treasure—and the merchant who found the priceless pearl—as **Jesus**. He was the one who, in all the dirt and mess of the world found the treasure—people and sold, gave up everything to buy them back; redeem them. He’s the merchant who, somehow, saw us as the jewel He wanted—and give up everything, his throne—all his prerogatives as God—and his life—because He so valued us. That’s an interesting thought, isn’t it?
- B. I would **plead** with you this morning—to value the treasure. To make it your goal to value in your life what Jesus gave his life to do—as **He** valued it. Don’t trade what God has blessed...for a bowl of stew.