

**TEXT: Matthew 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."**

**THEME: LIFE'S GREATEST TREASURE**

1. What Is It?
2. Where Can I Find It?
3. What Does It Cost Me?

Dear Christian Friends:

When I first learned that we would be holding our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Kick Off here at the LFA hall, that the service would be outside, and that I would be sharing God's Word with you today, I felt a little disappointed. Here we are celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our church and we're not even at the church. I felt a little cheated that we would not be starting our celebration in the beautiful building that God has provided for us to worship him in. Then I realized how silly I was being. What are we really celebrating? Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church is not a building at 1010 33<sup>rd</sup> Street in the south end of Bay City. Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church is you and me—God's people—gathered around his Word, wherever we might be. And that has been true, thanks to God, for almost 125 years now.

The treasure we are celebrating is not a big, beautiful church building. After all, it has only been around for 48 years. The treasure we are celebrating is not our south campus, which houses our wonderful educational ministries—childcare, preschool, and Lutheran elementary school. That building and property have been ours for only 8 years. The treasure we are celebrating is not our north campus either, with its spacious, wood floor gymnasium, locker rooms, youth room, and our wonderful Amazing Grace Bookstore ministry. The oldest part of that building has only been around for 62 years. No, we are celebrating something much more than property and buildings. We are celebrating the fact that God has given this body of believers, this family of brothers and sisters in the faith, LIFE'S GREATEST TREASURE for 125 years.

**LIFE'S GREATEST TREASURE—WHAT IS IT?** In Jesus' day, people had only the fields in which to hide their valuables. In the dark of night or at the approach of an enemy, they would bury their treasures under the sod. A treasure might stay there for years if something happened to the owner. Then one day a farmer working in the field would feel a tug on his plow, and the treasure would lie exposed. What a find! There it is! It's his and he's rich!

Of what treasure is Jesus speaking in his parable? He means himself. He means the rubies of forgiveness for all your sins and my sins, made red by his own blood. He means the gold pieces of his peace for your soul and my soul, restored to fellowship with our Maker. He means the diamonds of eternal life, glittering in heaven for you and for me. Christ and all he is, all he offers, all he has, are the treasures he wants you and me to have. That's the treasure the members of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church have cherished, enjoyed, and shared for 125 years.

Several years ago, more than a million people trooped to the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago to view an exhibit of artifacts from the *Titanic*. By the way, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church was already 26 years old when the *Titanic* sank. Well, much of the excitement about the *Titanic* museum exhibit was for the lifestyle that vessel represented. The experts tell us that 11 millionaires with a combined wealth of nearly \$200 million went down with that ship. What do you think those 11 would have said that day about life's greatest treasure? What do you say? Hopefully, it's Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus.

Yet, the idea of buried treasure in the parable of Jesus still holds a certain fascination, doesn't it? I've had the opportunity to spend some time in the wonderful state of Arizona. Part of that time has been near the Superstition Mountains on the east end of the Valley of the Sun. People are still looking for the treasure supposedly buried somewhere in those mountains. Every so often some con man takes people for a bundle because he claims to have a map showing where the gold is hidden.

Where do we find Jesus, the supreme treasure? What's the map that leads us to the gold of his pardon and peace? In the parable the man found his treasure right before him in the soil beneath his plow. The wise men from the East found their treasure in the house at Bethlehem. The aged Simeon found it in the temple. The woman of Samaria found it at Jacob's well. Mary of Bethany found it at Jesus' feet. The dying malefactor found it at the center cross. You and I have found it in our parents' homes, at baptismal fonts, in church pews, and at communion rails. We find it in the means of grace, proclaimed and administered at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. All these instances have one thing in common: the blessed gospel message of our gracious God.

God's Word is the one thing that has never changed and—God grant it—never will change at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. God's Word is the map he has given us to find life's greatest treasure. That's why God gave the Scriptures, **“to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15)**. In his Word, God speaks to you and me. And his main message is about his Son, our only Savior. Where do we find life's greatest treasure? There's no other place but in the Word, and we can have the Word wherever we are.

But WHAT DOES IT COST, life's greatest treasure? The treasure in the field cost the finder nothing. Someone else had earned or paid for it. Yet it cost him everything. He sold his all in order to buy the field so he might have the treasure for himself.

So it is with the treasure of your salvation. Forgiveness for your sins, peace, with God, heaven for your future home is free for the taking. But only because someone else has already earned and paid for it, a price far beyond your means. Your salvation cost Christ everything. Its cost brought him from heaven to take your hideous sins to the cross, to take them into hell for total payment, to take them away forever that he might take you to his heaven. Only God himself could afford the redemptive price for your soul. Now he hands his treasure of salvation freely to you. Christ has covered the cost.

And yet that free treasure costs you everything, my friends. When Christ gave his treasure to the disciples, we read, **“[They] left everything and followed him” (Luke 5:11)**. When Paul received this treasure, he declared, **“I consider everything a loss compared to the**

**surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).** The Savior in your heart means the Savior in your life. New values, new attitudes, new actions are yours in life, not because they are forced on you or pressured out of you, but because you treasure what God has given you in Jesus more than anything else in the world. LIFE’S GREATEST TREASURE is working in your life when you say no to sin, when you share God’s Word with a friend, when you help someone less fortunate than you, when you try to live your life to please God out of love and gratitude for what God has done for you.

My friends, during this 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we are excited about the new parking lot and the new landscaping...and we should be. We are looking forward to hearing the guest speakers, most of whom are sons of our congregation, as they share God’s Word with us. We will rejoice at singing God’s praises with our guest organists leading us. That’s great! But may our greatest celebration be of our Savior Jesus—LIFE’S GREATEST TREASURE—today and throughout all generations. Amen.

## Prayer of the Church

O God, our help throughout all generations, at this 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary kick off we reflect on your past help and are encouraged in our hope for the future.

We praise you for keeping and sustaining your people throughout the ages and for preserving the preaching of your Word and the administration of your sacraments among us. You have graciously given us life's greatest treasure in great abundance. We praise you also for using us to bring to others the good news that sinners are reconciled to you through the life and death of Jesus Christ. What an awesome privilege you give us in allowing us to share life's greatest treasure with others.

Now we ask you to give us courage and hope as we move day by day into the future. Be with us as we strive to pass down to our children the truths that have been passed down to us. Let your saving Word continue to be our great heritage throughout all generations. Continue to make our congregation and school a beacon of your light in this sin-darkened world.

Grant that this year-long celebration of your gracious activity at Trinity in years and ages past be only the prelude to that far greater celebration we will enjoy forever in the joy and glory of the world to come. Still be our guard while troubles last and our eternal home. Amen.