



30th July 2017

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Revd Tony Gardiner

Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." (Matt. 13:45-46) .

Pearls are very beautiful things. A perfect sphere of purest white, or sometimes pink or occasionally black, cloudily reflective with a multitude of subtle shades known as "orient", a pearl is one of the loveliest things on earth. As you know, a natural pearl is formed when a piece of sand falls into the open shell of the oyster. To avoid irritation, the oyster slowly covers the gritty fragment with concentric layers of smooth and translucent nacre or "mother-of-pearl". If it's less than perfectly spherical or the purity of the colour is marred, it's much less valuable. The value comes from rarity, and from the labour of the pearl fishers, who often have to dive to great depths to bring up the oysters, only a few of which will contain a pearl. Cleopatra dissolved pearls in wine and drank it as an ostentatious display of wealth. In the Bible, Job compares the value of the wisdom that comes from God to the most expensive things he knows.

No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;

The price of wisdom is above pearls.

So, pearls were bought, and sold on at a profit, by greedy merchants, until they could find a king or a princess who was willing to pay a worthy price for a perfect pearl. Jesus told a parable about a pearl merchant who dreamt of owning a pearl of great price; when he came across one he had no hesitation in selling off everything that he owned so that he'd have enough money to buy his life's dream, an absolutely perfect pearl.

Jesus said we should desire the Kingdom of God as much as that merchant desired the pearl. No sacrifice is too great to make, so that we may obtain the Kingdom of God; the kingdom of God should be the number-one priority in our whole life. God is the king wherever people obey him. In comparing the Kingdom to a pearl, Jesus is saying that the Kingdom is beautiful. You might not think it, to look at the gloomy and forbidding Puritans who are nagged by “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy”. But if you’re one of the blessed ones who is in love, or have ever been in love, you know that love is beautiful, precious and wonderful, above anything else on earth. Well, the Kingdom of God is being in love with God and knowing that God loves you.

The Kingdom of God is the pearl of great price. Many other things in life are precious and lovely. Art and Music, fine clothes and good food, foreign travel. A comfortable home and a desirable car, controlling a large organisation, providing for your children – these are all good things and worthy ambitions. God ‘s pleased when we have them. But they are not as important as the Kingdom of God. They are like grade-two pearls, compared to a really magnificent top-of-the -range specimen. The Kingdom of God must always take priority. A poem with the title “God First” hung over a child’s bed. When the child grew up those words reminded her always that however important other things might seem, serving God must always take first place.

A proverb quoted by Voltaire runs: “The best is the enemy of the good “. In other words, to achieve the best in life you will often have to reject other things which are quite good, but not so important. If a couple have found true love, they’ll gladly sacrifice trivial pleasures for the joy of being together. John Dryden, in his play *All for Love* wrote;

Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;

He who would search for pearls must dive below.

To find love and meaning in your life, you must go below the surface to find the Kingdom of God. When you have found it, be ready to sacrifice anything, however good and important to make God the ruler of your life. The pearl of great of price takes priority over lesser goods, and whatever you have sacrificed, you will get back in other ways. Jesus said: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you”.