

"Buried Treasure" A sermon based on Isaiah 44:6-8; Psalm 139:1-12;23-24; and Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 delivered on July 19, 2026, by the Rev. Alison Dutton Jacobs at the First Congregational UCC of Onkama, Michigan.

Jesus mostly spoke in parables. This section of Matthew's Gospel is nothing but one parable after another strung together like pearls on a necklace. These parables, each one a gem in itself, are often called the "Parables of the Kingdom." Jesus spoke in parables because he was trying to describe, by use of metaphor, by storytelling and examples, something that is indescribable. What would God's kingdom be like? Inquiring minds want to know!

Listening to these parables and trying to dig-out the truth that they hold for us is like searching for buried treasure. Each layer that we encounter gives way to another layer of understanding as we dig deeper into their meaning. Using images that would have been easily understood in the context of the first century culture, Jesus tries to describe various aspects of what the kingdom of heaven entails. It is like a mustard seed where seemingly small things can grow mysteriously into things that make a great impact on the world. Jesus says, that when you see this happening, you know that the kingdom of heaven is near.

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven. Like three measures of yeast in bread dough. It is the ingredient that causes necessary nurturing things to flourish and grow and it leavens "all" the dough evenly and equally. When this nurturing and personal growth are evenly distributed in the human context you know that you are touching the hems of what it is like to be in the Kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. This treasure is so precious that we are to give up everything else to buy into that field. In other words, the most valuable thing that we can have is our connection to God and anything else is just material gain, not spiritual gain. When we feel that we have that spiritual connection: that valuable treasure, then, that is the Kingdom!

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he finds one pearl of great value, he will sell everything to buy it. And again, the

kingdom of heaven is like a net which is thrown into the sea. . . Wait—stop. .
 Enough! I don't know about you, but I am in overload! One more description of the Kingdom and I think that I will be totally muddled!! There is just too much to sort out here and too much to unbury! The treasure seems even further from our "grasp" than ever!

How do we make sense of these words of Jesus, and find the essence of the treasure that they hold for us in the 21st Century when most of us do not farm, fish, buy and sell pearls or even bake bread? How do we describe the precious feeling that we have when we know—know without a doubt—that the realm of God is present in our midst? What personal parables would we use to help other people understand? Each of us would have a different story to tell, but mine is about a woman named Delores.

Delores was a member of my first congregation, a congregation that had never had a woman as a pastor before, a German Congregational parish, which could only barely tolerate women in any position of leadership. Delores was a woman of about 60 years old. She didn't drive. She walked everywhere, or her husband drove her. She had been married to a man who was an alcoholic and wife batterer for many years. When he died, she remarried a man who respected her and treated her with utmost kindness. Delores felt she had no voice. She would come to guild meetings and not say a word. She would say "O no, I can't do that—I am stupid about those things." Or "Oh no, I could never be president of the guild." Or, "Oh no, I don't know how to speak in public." Each time she would put herself down, I would tell her about her gifts: how organized she was; what a good memory she had for details; how her quiet spirit was an example to us all and what good ideas she had for fundraisers in the church. I reminded her that we were a congregational church and everybody has a voice.

Soon, she began to come to Council meetings. First, she just listened but then every once and a while you could hear her making some suggestion under her breath. About a year later, at an Annual Meeting of the church, this quiet woman stood up and in a firm and confident voice spoke to a major issue, stating her

opinion, speaking of her faith, witnessing to us all! I had tears in my eyes, because at that split second, in that very moment, I knew that the Kingdom of Heaven had drawn near. Delores went on to hold office both in the Guild and in the church. She had indeed found her spiritual strength and a voice to express it; so much so that even on the very day before she died of cancer, she organized and prepared the funeral luncheon for another long-time church member. I can still see her walking down the hill from her house, with a plate of cookies in her hand. The kingdom of heaven is like that! Delores' spirit was buried treasure until she realized that she, too, had a voice! What Delores' transformation reminds us all is what we hear so poetically expressed in Psalm 139:

¹ *You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.*

² *You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.*

³ *You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.*

⁴ *Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.*

And again, the kingdom of heaven is like this Sufi story, actually entitled "Buried Treasure:"

Once a farmer lay on his deathbed despairing of the fate of his lazy sons. Near his final hour, an inspiration came to him. He called his sons around his bedside and bade them draw in close. "I am soon to leave this world, my sons," he whispered. "I want you to know that I have left a treasure of gold for you. I have hidden it in my field. Dig carefully and well and you shall find it. I ask only that you share it amongst yourselves evenly."

The sons begged him to tell them *exactly* where he had buried it, but the father breathed his last breath and spoke no more.

As soon as their father was buried, the sons took up their pitchforks and shovels and began to turn over the soil in their father's field. They dug and dug until they had turned over the whole field twice. They found no treasure. But they decided that since the field was so well dug up they might as well plant some grain as their father had done. The crop grew well for them. After the harvest they decided to dig again in hopes of finding the buried treasure. Again they found not a treasure, but a field prepared for sowing. This year's crop was better than the one before.

This went on for a number of years until the sons had grown accustomed to the cycles of the seasons and the rewards of daily labor. By that time their farming earned them each enough money to live a happy life. It was then that they realized the treasure their father had left for them.

God's kingdom is indeed like buried treasure—each day we dig down another layer—and each day we see more of what it means to be in true relationship with Creation and its Creator. We are in search of "the rock" which is our Lord God, as God tells us in Isaiah 44 when he says:

"Do not tremble, do not be afraid.

Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?

You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?

No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

We sense those ineffable "rock-like" spiritual moments that otherwise might be buried in our constant worrying and frantic activities. God taps us on the shoulder through an unlikely event, God sends that person that we so needed to talk with, the thing we were so worried about dissolves in thin air, the problem we have

wrestled with for so long becomes clear and doable. We have all had these moments of the presence of God's Kingdom infiltrating our seemingly complicated lives. In conclusion, a Mary Oliver poem which says it all . . .

I Worried

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn
as it was taught, and if not how shall
I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,
can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows
can do it and I am, well,
hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,
am I going to get rheumatism,
lockjaw, dementia?

Finally, I saw that worrying had come to nothing.
And gave it up. And took my old body
and went out into the morning,
and sang.

Amen.