

The Kingdom of Heaven

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ!...

Fred Craddock was once noted by Time magazine as being one of the best story tellers and preachers of the 20th century... for years he would tell personal, and sometimes very colorful and entertaining tales about his life and about the world... in one of his more imaginary tales (he tells the story of a man who finds himself talking to a greyhound)...

As the story goes the man first meets the dog while visiting some friends in Connecticut... with no one else in the living room but the man and the dog - the dog turns to the man and asks, *"Is this your first time to Connecticut?"*

"No," the man answers... *"I went to school up here a long time ago."*

"Well, I guess you heard... I came up here from Miami," the dog shoots back...

"Oh, are you retired?" the man asks.

"No, is that what my family told you?... No, no, I didn't retire... I tell you, I spent 6 years as a professional, racing greyhound... That means 6 years of running around that track (day after day), seven days a week - with other dogs chasing that same rabbit..."

Well, one day, I got up real close - and for the first time in my life I got a good look at that rabbit we were chasing... and would you believe it? - it was a fake!...

that day I realized, I had spent my whole life up to that point chasing after something that wasn't real!... and so to answer your question - no, I didn't retire; I quit!" ... quit chasing after things that don't really exist" ...

The reason why I love that story is because in some ways I think we can relate it to our own lives as well... I mean, how many of us can relate to chasing after things that don't ever make good on their promises?... or don't truly live up to what they claim to be?...

For some of you it's a relationship - you put all of your energy into someone you love, all of your hope, all of your dreams - only to find out (that the person you thought you knew) was nothing more than a fake...

For some it's the lure of financial success - and so every day you get up at 5 am, make that long commute, sacrifice precious time away from your family and loved ones (which can never be paid back) - only to find out one day - that money could never fill that deep-seated emptiness (that has been part of you all of your life)... money was nothing more than an illusion... it is (and has always been) a false substitute for what you really need – confidence in something that's Eternal...

It says to us in Matthew 16:26, *“For what will it profit a man (or a woman) if he or she gains the whole world – and yet forfeits his soul?”*

You know, years ago Sigmund Freud once said that human beings are driven by their sexual instincts - but years later another man named Viktor Frankl wrote a book titled, ‘Man’s Search For Meaning’ where he makes a different claim... Frankl believed that it isn't our sexual instincts that drive us - as much as it is our desire to find a sense of meaning and purpose...

Which is why all of us - in some way or another - go chasing after things (like a greyhound on a racetrack) – only to find that those things disappoint (especially when you're hurting, grieving, or struggling to find peace)... and as a minister I see it all the time – regret in chasing after the wrong rabbit...

Well, in today's Gospel Jesus tells us that treasure (we're all looking for) is found in the Kingdom of Heaven (which is what we mean when we speak of Eternal Life – of a world without suffering – and where we speak of 'salvation' (which is another way of saying, 'be made whole again'))...

But Jesus also adds that the reason why so many people don't look to heaven for their sense of meaning and purpose (is that right now while we're here on earth) the things of God may seem insignificant - perhaps even hidden from our eyes...

in fact, in today's Gospel lesson from Matthew 13:33 - Jesus uses the example of a treasure being hidden under the ground, a fine pearl being discovered by chance, the miracle of yeast causing bread to rise, or even the small mustard seed - which may seem insignificant at first (but has the ability to grow bigger than any other shrub)...

and all of these parables are used to remind us - that although the Kingdom of Heaven may seem out of view for many people right now (especially people who do not believe in the Spirit)- we know that through the

testimony of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (and by the Grace of God) **it** **has** arrived - and is waiting to be found by all who love the Lord (and who are willing to put their faith in Jesus (and not the things of this world))...

and when our lives end here on earth, we know that our lives will continue in the Kingdom of Heaven (through our faith in the Good News – that God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son and whoever believes in him shall not perish but find Eternal Life)...

That's why Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:33, "*Seek first the kingdom of heaven - and all these things will be added to you*"...

Or why he tells us in Matthew 10:39, "*Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it*"... (you can't take it with you – and if you leave here with nothing – than what do you have if you do not have Jesus)?...

In other words, with the same drive and the same energy you've been chasing after for the things of this world (that which can only disappoint you in the end) - chase after the Kingdom of Heaven (and the things of God)... and you will discover is not only your purpose (but also your peace)... because the promise of scripture is that God will never disappoint those who call upon Him (and His promise is that He will never leave us)...

You know, Ernest Hemingway believed in that message in his own special way - being raised in Oak Park, Illinois (where even today this town houses some of the nation's wealthiest people) Hemingway saw firsthand the foolishness of people who invest all of their energy and time in things (that in the end) will fade away...

and in one of the last novels he wrote - titled 'The Old Man and the Sea' he tells an analogous story about an old man who catches the biggest fish ever... and all day long he's out at sea struggling to reel him in...

Well to keep a long story short the old man wins the war (and gets the fish)...

But there's only one problem: the fish is too big for the boat...

So the old man ties the fish to the side of the boat and proceeds to head home... but as he's on his way home sharks circle the boat and take bites out of the fish - so that by the time he reaches the dock - there's nothing left but a skeleton... (all of that for nothing)...

And what Hemingway was trying to say in his book - just like Jesus teaches in God's Word – was that when you spend your life chasing after fruitless ventures – all you'll ever find is emptiness and disappointment (because none of those things lead you to finding Life)...

Friends, don't let your own life end like that... don't spend the rest of your life chasing after the wind (chasing after things that can only bring you temporary happiness) – that *moth and rust destroy*... because in the end you will be alone and you'll come up empty...

instead dream bigger... dream of God's Eternal embrace... dream of those things which bring forth everlasting peace and happiness... and live your life each day as a child of God...

Leave here today with a desire for the Kingdom of Heaven and may you always be blessed to have His treasure in your heart...

In Jesus' name we pray...

Amen!