

## ON LIKENING HEAVEN TO A WHOLESALER

Matthew 13:44-46, Philippians 3:7, 1:2

Right off, I cannot think of a churchman today who would liken the kingdom of heaven to a corporate executive doing anything! Who but Jesus of Nazareth would dare today to say: "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant...the word is (*Greek word ?*) from which we get "emporium", and possibly the Spanish, "empresario". It means one who travels widely in the interest of trade and profit.

It would be decidedly unfashionable nowadays; however, to find heavenly similitudes in the international junketings of a corporation executive in search of the ultimate investment. But Jesus, unaffiliated as he was with any pressure group, felt perfectly free to find flashes of kingdom insight in the doings of very rich men as well as very poor men and was notably unafraid of either and perfectly at home with both.

So, as the one parable tells of a probably poor tenant farmer stumbling upon treasure in his field—so the other one tells of a wealthy wholesaler, let us say an international jewel dealer, a Tiffany or a (.....) man, on an expense account trip, say flying the Concorde "in search of fine pearls", who comes suddenly and unexpectedly upon "one pearl of great value", a truly superlative jewel, of such scintillate beauty as to warrant the investment of the firm's entire worth.

Now a brief pause for self identification. Part one: How gratifying to know that life's greatest treasure may be come upon by more than one class of people—including us. It is the temptation of scholars, partisan politicians, of professional religionist, and various other snob groups, to believe that true joy is restricted to their particular side of the fence. Leave it to Jesus, God's kind one, to believe that the kingdom of heaven is open to all believers who might look for, or even stumble quite by accident through its gate. In our time of warring camps, one reads the parables with relief or maybe a cheer: "Hooray for God, who is no snob"!

The point is—even you and I, as poverty-classified or as richly taxed, as woefully intellectual, or as willfully ignorant as we may be—even we, whoever we are, may come upon kingdom joy. At least, it's comforting to know God thinks so. The kingdom of heaven

641011 Page 1

Don't Cliff  
on Angels



is occupied, apparently, if the parables hold any light, by more than one class, not just academics, and ecclesiastics and other Pharasees, but also by tenant farmers and corporation executives, to name only two. So, no snobbery at all in the kingdom of God.

But, in the second place, there is also more than a bit of serendipity about the kingdom. You know what “serendipity” is. It is a word coined by Horace Walpole from the fairy tale, “The Three Princes of Serendip”, who were always setting out to find one thing and always ending up finding something quite different and much, much better--namely, love.

Well, as I was saying, there’s quite a bit of serendipity involved in these kingdom parables. The poor share-cropper stumbles by accident upon treasure in a field he set out only to plow. The rich wholesaler, the jewel merchant, comes suddenly, unexpectedly upon, “one pearl of great value”, when he was merely out on an ordinary buying trip, “in search of fine pearls, “as usual”.

Serendipity is in the very nature of sainthood. No one ever yet got to be a saint by setting out to be one.

Once I came upon a little eh...angel preparing for a Christmas pageant. She was throwing paper and glue and gilt around wildly. When I asked her, “What are you doing?” I got the answer I deserved, “Go way... I working on my halo!” I thought to myself: “Oh honey, you don’t need a halo!” At any rate, people who set out to make a halo for themselves will never be happy, much less holy. That is an axiom of the faith.

One can major in Religion, and by some miracle, end up religious, but not as cause and effect. Professional religionists are the least likely in the world to end up religious (or so Jesus thought about the Pharasees).

For you see, sainthood, true religion, blessedness, pure happiness, the supreme treasure, the superlative jewel of joy in the brightness of God, life’s major dream, is never to be majored in. You can’t get a Ph.D. in contentment. It is rather to be come upon in the midst of ordinary field-hand labors, or the customary duties of executive life, or whenever a person is hard at work at the task at hand and quite likely nowhere else. You cannot go out looking



for “joy”. Finding joy is ever God’s surprise in the midst. It is the poor laborer or the rich entrepreneur , each very tired, maybe, doing his day’s lot; but suddenly discovering the brightness of God in the gift of life itself, in the laughter of love, and stretch of work, an unexpected discovery, like coming upon treasure in a field, or one jewel that outshines all the rest, some touch of a gladness, an unmerited gift, that makes the whole life sing. That’s serendipity. Starting out only to raise a better crop, find a superior investment, and coming across a life that makes one say, “I’d give anything in the world to live like this forever!”

Which brings us to the third point, and it isn’t sacrifice. Both the poor man and the rich man in these two parables are willing to risk all, give anything , everything they’ve got for this treasured atmosphere, this jewel, this heaven of a life; but they don’t feel that it’s any sacrifice. The verbs are all running , in a hurry: “goes,...sells,...buys”; with an eager abandon, they run. Niggardly, begrudging , stingy persons, carefully calculating how little they can get by with putting in the plate of life, usually let it pass them up, never knowing the joy of giving themselves away.

Happiness is not a quality of parsimony--but of giving oneself lavishly and ungrudgingly into whatever makes one’s life make sense.

Is a parent happy, who keeps reminding a child: “Remember all I’ve done for you! All I’ve sacrificed for you!” Of course not. The verbs in a good parent’s life are all running: “goes...sells...buys...”, never pausing to count the cost. How do you calculate love in the family? It’s too great a treasure, too superlative a jewel for certified public accounting. It’s worth your whole heart and your whole soul forever!

Or again: is a man happy who tabulates and wants full credit for every copper of effort he puts into his profession? “Pay me!” No. He’s supremely happy at his work only when he throws his life into his job with thoughtless, lavish abandon, knowing that this is what his being is all about. This is what he was born to do. And if he dies at his desk, his wheel, his laboratory, or in his pulpit, in willful dedication to his task, so what better death is there? Do not weep for him. He has not outlived his life.

And what is true of one’s profession--is true of one’s profession of faith. The Christian, be  
641011 Page 3



he poor man, rich man, if about his ordinary labors, he comes upon the supreme gift of God in Christ with much surprise, and finds the life of love so satisfying, he gives his best to it without thought of cost.

I remember an old gentleman who said of 40 years with his wife: "Ours has been a merry marriage." They had given each other everything. They had given themselves but never called it sacrifice. Who counts cost when here is the treasure, the jewel found?

For the Christian, the great good of the love of God in Christ is of such value. It is worth anything, everything.

You don't ever have to ask Christians to give--their faith, their hope, their love--themselves. You only have to warn them to stop before they give too much. And then, like Christ, when the disciples warned him to stop before he gave his very life, they will not hear you, for like their Lord, it is the giving of life down to the very death, which is indeed life eternal.

Ah Paul, good, kind St. Paul, it was you who said, "what things were given to me, those I counted loss (worthless) for Christ. For, to me, to live is Christ, and to die is (to) gain (him).  
Pilippians 3:7, 1:2