

**LUTHERAN PARISH NURSE INTERNATIONAL  
BIBLE STUDY**

**ORDINARY SOIL—TREMENDOUS TREASURE: THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE,  
MATTHEW 13:44**

Dr. Daniel Paavola  
Concordia University Wisconsin  
Mequon, Wisconsin

September, 2011

**OPENING:** Most of what I grow is on top of the soil. I can see all summer how things are going. The flowers are blooming, new branches are stretching out, and the berries are ready to be picked. But many of you are more adventurous or faith-filled in your gardening and growing. You grow potatoes, carrots, onions, and all the rest that are under the surface. Now that takes trust!

Of course, you can sneak a peek every so often and see if there's anything there. But it's not like you can uproot a potato, and then happily stuff it back in the hole, expecting that it will all be the just the same. And you can only uproot so many trial onions before you have no onions left. So in the end, you live by faith.

In our parable of the hidden treasure, we find ordinary soil with an extraordinary treasure beneath it. Nothing showed the treasure or it would have been found before. But suddenly there it was. Let's think of how God has buried treasures in the ordinary soil of our field.

When have you found an amazingly rich harvest that you couldn't see coming?

How easy or difficult was it to wait for that harvest without plucking things up ahead of time?

**STUDY: READ MATTHEW 13:44-50**

Three short parables together give us a common theme of buried treasure. There is on the surface little evidence of the riches of the treasure, the pearl, or the catch. But to either the fortunate or the discerning, there is a life-changing fortune waiting to be discovered.

Previous to the parable of buried treasure, we have had three parables of growing: the four soils or the Sower, 13:1-9, the weeds among the wheat, 13:24-30, and the mustard seed, 13:31-32. (A similar parable—the leaven in the lump of dough, 13:33, follows.) Three times we've focused on what we can see above the soil. Why is it now perhaps time to focus on what is hidden beneath the soil?

The treasure that is found is to be taken at face value. We're not to worry about who put it there, or the ethics of buying the field without revealing the treasure. It is a discovered gift. Whoever put it there either intended someone to find it and use it, or they are long gone.

How does this hidden nature of the treasure match the truth of the Gospel message? What is especially hidden in the news of:

*The incarnation of Jesus*

*The value of his single death*

*The truth of his resurrection and the promise of resurrection for the world*

### *The promise and richness of heaven*

To gain this treasure, the man gladly sells all that he has to buy the field. We can imagine the easy negotiation that he goes through. No arguing with the price. No delay in making the payment. The only anxiety is how fast all this can get done. The man is certain that whatever the cost, it is nothing compared to the treasure's worth. He might also be a bit worried that someone else will find the treasure before the deal is done.

*How is there a similar excitement in gaining the promises of the Gospel? When have you seen a similar urgency on the part of someone, perhaps new to the faith or new to a congregation?*

Unusual is the idea that the treasure is gained by selling all that one has. Of course, this doesn't imply an earning of our salvation. But we might go to Philippians 3:7-11 for a picture of the loss of all things for the sake of Christ and the gaining of a relationship with him, and the offered experiences in that relationship. *Using Philippians 3:7-11 as a starting point, how do adult Christians even after decades of faithful following still find themselves selling or giving away something to gain Christ? Besides Philippians 3, consider also Matthew 6:25-34 for another set of what can be given away for the sake of the Gospel. A final image of this would be Matthew 19:16-22.*

Finally, the field is only a covering for the treasure. You buy the field, necessarily, though the focus is on the treasure. You might even have a great affection for the field because through it came the treasure. Yet, by itself, the field has no overwhelming value.

*What is the field that holds and hides the treasure of the Gospel? I expect that many possible answers are in our experiences including institutions, places, people, and events in our lives. How is this field just described both necessary and beloved, even though we recognize that the real treasure lies distinct within it?*

***APPLY:*** *What soil covers the treasures of your ministry? Is the covering easily seen through every day, or is it only with long study or sudden inspiration that you've found a treasure in the ordinary field in which you work?*

*Is the treasure still hidden, waiting, like potatoes or carrots, for a more opportune time to be found?*

Finally, a personal parallel might be helpful. When I was the pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Butternut, Wisconsin, I was convinced that anyone would naturally want to belong to our church once they got to know the people there. It was a remarkable body of people, especially in a very small town in the far north woods. And yet they did adventurous things that were beyond what you would expect from such a small town. If you just knew them, you would want to join them. That church was a treasure hidden in the deep north woods.

*When you've found a treasure in your congregation or ministry, how can you share the excitement of this discovery? And how can you invite people to share in "owning" the treasure in a way that goes beyond the limits of the parable?*