

---

**Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ**

A Matter of Perception

*A Sermon by*

Judy Green-Davis

Scripture: Matthew 13:34-35, 44-45

July 27, 2008

Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ  
555 West Glendale Avenue • Phoenix, Arizona 85021  
602-264-1221 • [info@beatitudeschurch.org](mailto:info@beatitudeschurch.org)  
[www.beatitudeschurch.org](http://www.beatitudeschurch.org)

🎵 God is still speaking,

I had a problem with the tires on my Mercury station wagon. To me, the tires almost always looked like they were about three pounds of air away from a flat. When that happened, I put more air in.

Then, the last time I went to Jiffy Lube, the mechanic asked me who put the air in the tires. I said, "I did. Why, are they underinflated?" He said, "No, they're seriously overinflated. They have so much air, it's dangerous."

Sigh. I went home and pondered the situation. Those tires just plain looked low. But then, it slowly dawned on me; the problem was not the tires at all.

The problem is, I'm getting older.

You see, for most of my formative years and my early driving years, tires were these big, heavy, fat things. Remember when the whitewall stripes were four inches wide? Now, they're only two inches. Tire technology has changed but my tire perception hasn't. The new tires look like wimpy flats to me. This getting older is complicated business.

I think the ability to change our perception is a big part of being able to see the world realistically. We all know people who are stuck with some old perceptions—for instance, there's my grandmother who never understood why gasoline didn't still cost 12 cents a gallon like it did decades ago.

In looking at the scripture for today, it's always a good idea to start by asking, what did this passage mean to those who were listening to Jesus? What were their perceptions of the vivid stories that he told?

The parable of the treasure in the field makes us think, perhaps, of guys in the park with metal detectors looking for lost items. But, to the people in the crowd listening to Jesus, the idea of buried treasure was a perfectly normal banking technique. In the ancient world, ordinary people didn't have access to banks. They used the earth. They hid their important possessions in the earth.

Jesus also tells us about this type of banking in his parable of the man who gave his servants three talents. One of the servants buried his so he wouldn't lose it.

Moreover, in Jesus' day and for centuries afterward, Israel was continually being invaded and occupied by foreign armies. Often, people were forced to become refugees, fleeing with what they could carry and traveling in dangerous territories.

To protect themselves and their valuables, people buried their valuables before they left home, hoping to come back later and reclaim them. Perhaps that was the situation when people hid the Dead Sea Scrolls.

But what happened when someone who was not the original owner dug up the treasure? Under the Romans, the Jews were allowed to keep their own traditional laws. It was rabbinic law that such discoveries belong to the finder. I suppose this is where we get our concept of “finders keepers, losers weepers.”

In the second parable, the jewel merchant finds a “pearl of great value.” Pearls at the time came from the Red Sea and from sources along the ancient trade routes. Pearls were considered valuable because of their great beauty and were held in much the same regard as diamonds are today.

While the first man accidentally found the buried treasure, the second man, the merchant, was trading in order to find a special pearl—he was working specifically to find it.

But in both these parables, the people who found the treasure immediately sacrificed everything they had to possess the treasure. They changed their perception of their entire lives and sacrificed literally everything for a treasure a beyond all measure.

But what could these parables mean for us today? The Bible indicates that we are God’s treasure. We are the pearl of great price. In Psalm 139, the psalmist writes that God has called us by name from the very beginning. God formed us in our mother’s wombs and walks with us every moment of our lives. Each of us is a child of God and worthy of that great love.

Yet, Henri Nouwen, in his book “Life of the Beloved” acknowledges that this is not an easy concept to embrace. He writes that it is easier to hear the negative voices inside ourselves and around us that imply that we have to earn love or achieve more in order to be worthy of love.

I recently graduated from a two-year program to become a Spiritual Director. In this program, we used Nouwen’s book as our core study. Nouwen talks about our being chosen by God, given to serve others, broken by life, and blessed by God. It was interesting to me that the students in my class were easily able to acknowledge their brokenness and their interest in serving others. But the concept of being chosen and beloved was very, very difficult to internalize. Perceiving ourselves as beautiful and loved unconditionally is a daunting task.

Journalist Sydney Harris says that ninety percent of the problems in the world come from people not knowing themselves—their frailties and even their gifts. Most of us go through life as complete strangers to our own selves.

Why is it so hard to love ourselves? Why do we think negative things about ourselves in the self-talk inside our heads? Why is it impossible to see ourselves from the perspective of God—as made in the image of our creator, unconditionally loved, and beautiful in our own way? Why is it so hard to believe that the things we hate about ourselves are never more real than the things we like about ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

Macrina Wiederkehr, a Benedictine nun writes, “We are a treasure waiting to be discovered. We are often the very last to discover the treasure of ourselves.”<sup>2</sup>

Looking at the parables of the field and the pearl, she writes, “You are that treasure, that precious stone. To find the treasure that you are, you must purchase the whole field of your life.”<sup>3</sup> We must purchase the field with its weeds and stones, with its flowers and buried treasure.

It is only in embracing fully who we are with our warts and gifts, our fears and our triumphs, that we find the true self that God sees. It takes digging in the field of our lives; it takes seeking and peering into the dark areas of our secret selves. But there’s a gift waiting for us—we are God’s beloved. We are born to live into the glory of God that is within us....in every single one of us. And when we can do that, it helps others to do the same.

Looking at ourselves from God’s point of view, Macrina says, “God didn’t hesitate to purchase the field of your life with . . . Jesus. We have been bought at a great price.”<sup>4</sup> God loves us so much that his son was given for us. For you. Not for “them,” not for “us” but for you. For me. For each of us as the beloved children of God.

Such love, such sacrifice is worthy of a great celebration. It’s certainly worthy of holding ourselves up to the light and turning, turning ourselves, trying to get even a glimpse of our own beauty from God’s perspective.

Macrina’s prayer for seeking that perspective is: Oh God, help me to believe the truth about myself, no matter how beautiful it is!

May it be so for each of us. Amen

---

<sup>1</sup> Ellen Goodman

<sup>2</sup> Macrina Wiederkehr, *A Tree Full of Angels, Seeing the Holy in the Ordinary*, page 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*