

October 1, 2023

Shiny Things

Paul Dean

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Mat 13:44-45 NRS)

I think one of the hardest jobs in the world is a sales job at the local store that isn't responsible for selling that stuff. You know when you walk into a local store, and you are there to buy a brisket or a couple of pork shoulders and someone is trying to sell you a new phone plan. You are there to buy some cucumbers, 5 pounds of dates, a serious amount of toilet paper and someone is trying to sell you knives. You are there to buy the largest bag of chocolate candy you can get your hands on, and someone is trying to sell you cookware, with a microphone. You are there to buy... ok you get it by now. I always want to say hi to those folks but the moment there is eye contact they are all over me, drawing me in and I end up mumbling something like "I'm good" or "I already have all of that" ... and they know I don't. What a hard job.

There are lots of shiny things in our world that are seeking our attention. Lots of shiny things that attract us. Lots of people are trying to sell us shiny things. I remember years ago the first time my wife and I were in one of those big box stores. There were so many shiny things that our cart was starting to fill up with, well, with things I didn't know I needed, but I was sure I couldn't live without. And yes... one of those items was 5 pounds of dates. I don't think I even really knew what a date was, but man was it shiny, and I had to have it. My wife made me put it back.

But sometimes you stumble upon a shiny thing that changes your life. Like a treasure hidden in a field, when you find it, you know if for the treasure that it is. And for me, around 12 years ago that shiny thing was... a BBQ smoker. At the moment, actually two BBQ smokers. Now before you judge me for being too shallow, or too smoky, the shiny thing I'm talking about isn't the BBQ smoker itself. It's

what the BBQ smoker has done. The shiny thing part of this story is how using one of these has changed my life. The amount of food that has come out of that, or now several, smokers is pretty astounding, but more astounding where that food has gone. 95% of the time that food has been donated to volunteer groups who give themselves for the sake of the other. That shiny thing even gave my wife, not me, the confidence to call the principal of Valley Middle School and offer to provide a free BBQ lunch for the entire staff on their last day of school. Both my kids attended Valley Middle and had incredible experiences with their teachers and staff. And we wanted to say thank you.

To be honest I was like, hey we could just send a card... but my wife was insistent. And she was right. And what so often what happens in the kingdom of God, more and more people are drawn in. Mike who is part of, or maybe the leader, (not sure if he'd want me to put that label on him) ... of the Holy Smokers here at Prince of Peace ended up showing up to help and since I was serving Resurrection Lutheran Church in Woodbury and was just starting a Holy Smokers there, Shawn from Resurrection, drove down from Woodbury and showed up too. That shiny thing, the treasure of the kingdom of God that seemed to randomly show up in our lives was worth using, was worth living into. The kingdom of God is like a treasure you stumble upon that brings people together to give thanks. The kingdom of God is like a treasure you didn't intend to find, but when find it, you are all in. No one has to sell it to you. You just get it.

There are other times though, that we are seeking the kingdom of God. Sometimes we are searching for more meaning in our lives. Sometimes we are intentional. Jesus says, like a buyer of pearls who always looking for that special one. And I know many people who are like this. Always seeking the kingdom of God. Prince of Peace is filled with lots and lots of people who are seeking the kingdom of God. I can remember some 20 years ago, Prince of Peace had a food shelf. And it was just that. A shelf in a closet in the other building with a couple of cans of food on it. And then came along a guy named Eric and he gathered some other folks, and in their actively seeking of the kingdom of God,

Mission Outpost was born. I can remember day after day Eric telling us that someone would call in need of a bed or a couch or a kitchen table and either that same day or the next someone would call in and say, hey we have a bed, or a couch, or a kitchen table, does anyone have need? And that happened over and over again, for years. It's almost as if the kingdom of God was banging down the doors. Crazy stuff.

But then again, not crazy at all. Because when you are actively seeking the shiny things, the pearl that is the kingdom of God, you will almost be blinded by the light that is everywhere. Jesus uses another parable to explain the pervasive nature of the kingdom of God.

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all the dough had risen." (Mat 13:33)

Once the yeast is added, you can't get it out. The kingdom of God is baked into the whole deal. In other words, the kingdom of God is everywhere. Sometimes you stumble upon it because you are looking for it but when you start looking for it you will see it all around you.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Mat 5:14-16 NRS)

Sometimes that city shows up outside a middle school to serve lunch. And sometimes that city gathers and commits itself to a long-term mission to feed, clothe and provide dental care for those in need. The kingdom of God shines brightly.

Here at Prince of Peace there are a couple of things I want you to consider. The first is that the kingdom of God is big enough for your questions. Big enough for your doubt. Big enough for your certainty. Big enough for you. No matter where you've been, the kingdom of God is big enough for you. Second, you are not just welcomed into the kingdom of God. You belong in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is for you. At times you will stumble into it and at times it will break through so bright and shiny that you'll almost be

blinded by its brilliance, but you belong. And the third is that Prince of Peace is ready to deploy you into the kingdom of God in ways that will change the world. Your time, your experience, your ability, your financial generosity is of utmost valuable to the kingdom of God. If you want to change the world, if you want to truly live into the kingdom of God, you are home here.