

Trinity 7 - Year A

For a bit of light relief, I occasionally watch 'Aussie Gold Hunters' on channel twelve. For a bit of variety though, on the same channel, is 'Outback Opal Hunters'. Both programmes focus on various people who are all after one thing... treasure... either the nugget of gold to beat all nuggets of gold or the piece of opal to beat all other opals! A modern day take perhaps on Jesus's parable of the pearl of great price from today's Gospel reading.

This parable is about the discovery of the most precious gift of all, the wisdom of Jesus that leads us to God.

Now the merchant's reaction might not be at all what a real merchant would have done: selling everything he owned to buy this one pearl. That seems a little ridiculous, but it's the ridiculous detail in Jesus' story that drives the point home: Christ's wisdom is beyond the price of pearls and it is worth more than everything we have. The merchant may seem foolish - but the wisdom of God appears foolish in the eyes of the world, and it demands the greatest commitment - everything we have once and for all for our whole lives.

But can we be comfortable with that? Such a commitment of a whole life now – of an unknown future, leaving nothing back - complete self-giving - is that even possible for us? A lot of life today is short-term, not long-term, or at least that's how we have come to find our world. Much in today's world is superficial. All of this can affect the way we see the whole of life.

Our lives simply no longer seem to have the unity and stability they perhaps once had. People seem less able to grasp their whole lives ahead of them as having a kind of unity, as being a single continuing story of a single life... there is fragmentation here. Our perceptions are also sometimes shaped by an idea of the endless possibilities of continually reinventing ourselves.

At the bottom of much of this lies the modern obsession with choice, the idea that choice somehow guarantees freedom and quality of life. But while career changes and new directions are often liberating, to make having choices so central to our idea of the good life is surely more double-edged. Along with making freedom of choice so central, there often goes unease about commitment, because if you make a commitment you limit your options. Making a committed choice seems to lessen your freedom, and sometimes people experience a tendency to put off the key decisions and commitments that somehow make our identities. We sometimes just like to keep our options open.

So there's the crucial question: is it possible in a world like this, even to commit oneself to following Christ as a Christian? Do we think of this commitment as opening us up to the fulfillment of our lives, or as just another way of limiting our options?

So does obsession with choice and keeping options open prevent us from selling everything we have and obtaining the pearl? Does the pearl cost us more in today's world than it did in the past? Though it may be difficult, divine grace means commitment is never impossible, and our human nature still makes us need it. In reality, only Christian commitment can give our lives the unity and stability they need by making them part of God's one story. Only Christian commitment can fully open up for us the fulfillment that truly makes us happy and free, a heavenly happiness and freedom that last forever and can never be lost.

The 'Aussie Gold Hunters' and the 'Outback Opal Hunters' on channel twelve may well find the priceless nugget of gold and the priceless opal respectively and I truly wish them luck, but it won't ultimately bring them authentic and lasting contentment.

The pearl of great price is offered to us, it doesn't depend on luck alone to find it... so let's grasp the pearl once and for all, a choice made with everything we have, with all that we are, and all that we will be. And may God who has begun this work in us bring it by his grace to its completion. **Amen**