

Do You Understand?

Matt 13:47-52

In Fort Bragg, CA where my family has a 3 generation history of fishing and recreation, there is a boat-builder that makes the sort of boats that you would see on Deadliest Catch, the Alaska, Bering Sea fishing show. In the Fort Bragg area these boats are outfitted with huge spools of nets that the boats drag behind them trapping fish in the nets. This is something like (but on a bigger scale) the dragnet that Jesus described in His story. Because of California fishing regulations, the fishermen on these boats must also take on the function of the angels in Jesus' story for what is caught must be sorted. In California, these are certain species of fish that can be legally caught and other species that would bring a fine or even arrest if you were to be caught with these fish in your possession. So the trawler will bring in the nets and then sort through the catch. The bad fish, the illegal catch, must be thrown back in the sea while the good (legal) catch is kept and put on ice until the boat returns to port.

Now this is the thing for me, because when you are fishing off the coast, you have no idea what you might be bringing up when something is on your line. Even if you do know what you have, you still have to bring it up even if it is illegal, in order to get rid of it. But when you do, in the case of an illegal bottom fish, bringing it up kills the fish. So, you have a dead fish that you have to throw back. You didn't mean to catch it, but now that you have accidentally killed it, you cannot eat it. You throw it in the ocean and watch the seagulls eat it. In California, this is what we call conservation.

Just this last summer I encountered an exception to this experience. While fishing on a party boat out of Fort Bragg, there was a certain species of bottom fish that the boat crew would "save." They would pop the air out of the fish and then attach it to a device that returned it to the bottom and then released it. So, the fish was saved. But the trawlers are not saving the illegal fish, why do we license them to fish in California?

Do you hear my frustration? The dragnet boat in Jesus' story is fishing for a catch to take to market. The good fish are the fish they can sell. The bad fish are the worthless ones because no one wants to buy them. The good fish are sold. The bad fish are thrown away. All the fish caught in the net are dead.

At the end of the age, when your life has long been over, the angels will separate the wicked from the just. The wicked will be cast in to the lake of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Some see the those caught in the net as the church. There are, according to Jesus' parables, both good and bad people in the church. To be in the church in the sense of being a member of Calvary-Grace Church, does not mean that you have genuinely been saved. We require that our members profess Christ and follow Jesus in believers baptism. But, we have to take people on their word. We cannot guarantee that every member of our church is a Christian. The fact is that everyone will come to the judgment as either good or bad, saved or lost, sincere or hypocrite, genuine disciple or pretender. There will be a judgment. Are you ready?

Then Jesus asked, "Have you understood all these things?"

The question is fascinating. When you ask this question, are you usually confident or doubtful that you have been understood? When you answer this question, are you more likely to answer that you do or don't understand? So, when we ask this question we are usually doubtful that we have been understood and when we answer it we are almost sure to say that we have understood! What is the point of the question? The fact is that even though you know that you don't completely understand when you say that you do, the asking of the question makes you aware that your understanding is lacking even when you say that it isn't. So, asking the question opens the opportunity to give further information toward understanding for even when the responder denies that such information is needed, he actually knows that it is.

So, in order to give more information to those who said that they didn't need any more information even though in their hearts they

knew that they were still lost, Jesus told the story of the Householder.

"Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the Kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

The image is of the householder, the patriarch of a large extended family. The householder cared for the needs of the entire household. The treasure represented the resources from which the householder could draw in order to meet the families' needs. In the treasure would have been recent acquisitions as well as ancient family heirlooms. It was out of this storehouse that the family was cared for.

The disciples were the scribes who had been instructed concerning the kingdom. As such they now had the role of the householder. The substance of their treasure was the instruction they had received. They were to take the instruction Jesus gave them and distribute it to their households in order to meet the needs of their house members. In the treasure of instruction from which they were to draw was both things that were new and old. The old was the reliance in the teaching of Jesus upon the faithful words of the past. Moses' Law, the prophets and writings of the Old Testament, these were the old things. The new things were the insights into the old, the radical anti-establishment message of love and service and forgiveness that were the themes that Jesus always returned to.

The Ten Commandments - old.

The Greatest Commandment and the one like it - new

An eye for an eye - old

Love your enemy - new

Giving alms - old

Giving alms secretly as worship of God - new

But the scribes in the story are not limited to those who heard Jesus speak these words. We have the words in front of us. Our opportunity for understanding is even greater. Do you understand? What you do understand is not meant just for you. It is meant to be shared with those in need. What you have learned in your walk with Christ is your treasure. It is not a treasure that you hoard. It is a treasure that you share and the more you do so the more treasure you will have. Unlike the householder of Jesus' story whose treasure was great but limited. Your treasure may be small but unlimited. The more you give, the more you will have.

Finally, will you allow your rich and generous relative who has told you over and over again that she wants to help you anytime you need it, will you allow her to help you? Let's say that you need a certain prescription and that without it you will be unable to work and you will lose your job. Your rich relative has promised that she will pay for your prescription will you let her know that you have run out so that she can help you?

If you have no transportation and you cannot get to work so that you are again in danger of losing your job, will you accept the car that she offers you? What if you have to take a bus to her house to pick up this car, will you go get it?

What if you are in love and you want to ask your girl to marry you but you have no money for a ring, your rich relative has given you a ring full of diamonds and all you have to do is take the ring to the jewelers and have the diamonds reset in a brand new setting and your rich relative will pay the jeweler for his work, will you do it?

Do you understand? Householders are nearby. The riches of the Word are available. Come and receive.