

Reading: Matthew 13:44-52

I wonder if you have ever searched for something with all your heart. For twelve years we lived in Timaru. And a great outing for the kids was going to the dump. I used to bribe the kids. “Help me at the dump and I'll buy you an ice cream.” One particular day, a man was off-loading his trailer into the pit. He came over with a terribly worried look on his face. “I've lost my wedding ring,” he said, “It's somewhere in my pile of rubbish.” So, the two of us climbed into the pit all the time waving at the front-end loader not to come and collect us. The man was frantic. “My wife will kill me,” he said in his despair. “I must find my ring.” So, we set to work and all the while he grew more and more desperate. Talk about a needle in a haystack! Did we find the ring? Did the kids get an ice cream? You'll need to wait to the end of the sermon to find out.

I wonder if you have searched for something with all your heart.

In the gospels Jesus presents us with lots of stories of heartfelt searches. There's the woman who loses a gold coin and searches high and low. There's the shepherd who searches for the lost sheep. And today's classic is the pearl buyer who finds the one pearl that is worth more than all the others, so he sells everything he has so that he can own it. So transfixed is he with the pearl that he gives everything he has in order to own it. And oh, the joy he discovers.

Whether it's the wedding ring, the lost coin, the lost sheep, the pearl of great price (and maybe we could add the vaccine for Covid), they all have a searcher who gives all they have to the search: their whole heart, and they all end in unparalleled joy.

But what is it that God searches for with all his heart? What is it that God puts all his effort into finding? What is it that gives God joy beyond measure at finding?

This morning we are baptising Jun. Jun and his family have come to us through the preschool. The baptism service begins with Scripture, “We love because God first loved us.” Before Jun's parents reached out to God, God was loving them. Before Jun was even conscious, God was loving him. However long Jun’s life is, God will always love him. And when he dies God goes on loving him. We love because God first loved us. There is as Paul reminds us today nothing in all creation that can separate us from God's love.

So, what is it that God searches for with all his heart? What is it that God puts all his effort into finding? What is it that gives God joy beyond all measure at finding?

The answer is so simple. You. And me. Before you were born, God’s love was searching for you, God puts everything into finding you, not even withholding the life of his own Son in order to bring you home. And what joy God has when we are finally found.

God even finds us even when we don’t want to be found.

Tim was at high school when God found him. He had heard on the grapevine that his uncle had got religion and was instructed to stay away from him.

As a pilot, Tim’s uncle would come through when he had a couple of days layover and stay with them frequently. Tim recalls he spent a year avoiding him.

Then one night his parents left town and he was left home with his uncle. He had a pretty great night planned. He had cases of beer stashed under the bushes in front of his house and for the first time in his life he was going to be going out with a girl who had a bad reputation.

In spite of these things, his uncle cornered him on the couch and proceeded to tell him about Jesus. He was waiting on his friend Brian to pick him up and Brian didn’t come, and he didn’t come and he didn’t come.

His uncle kept talking.

Somewhere in the middle of the conversation – he didn't remember what it was that his uncle said – but he said something that caught Tim's attention. And Tim listened. He was going out that night to find fulfilment for the achy emptiness that he had inside, even at the age of 16.

Tim realized that what his uncle was talking about was exactly what he needed in his life.

He got up and went to the other side of the house and closed the door of his bedroom. He knelt down next to his bed. He didn't remember exactly what he prayed, but he asked Jesus to be the leader of his life - you know, change him.

Tim finished praying and sat back on his heels and literally looked up at the ceiling and had two thoughts: 'I don't hear organ music' and 'there's no light beams coming through the ceiling'.

Brian never did show up.

But his annoying uncle had changed his life.

Today Tim doesn't have the achy feeling inside. He loves weightlifting, target shooting and spending time with his children.

How Much Am I worth? writes New Zealand hymn writer Colin Gibson:

What value's in me?

Do I count if I stand or I fall?

If I'm weak or I'm strong, If I win or I lose,

am I someone or no one at all?

Refrain:

I am worth ev'ry-thing, ev'ry thing, ev'ry-thing,

I am worth ev'ry-thing in the eyes of God.

*I am that bird that dropped to the ground,
the tiniest bird of them all,
and nobody knew, and nobody cared,
but our Father who cares for us all.*

Refrain

*I am that stone that fell from a ring,
that was precious beyond all compare;
and they hunted the house, till they cried out with joy,
when they saw it still gleaming down there.*

Refrain

*I am that child who felt lost and afraid
when she saw just how far she had roamed;
but they scoured the hills till they found her again,
and, rejoicing they brought her safe home.*

Refrain

*How much am I worth? Do I matter at all?
When I'm thinking it through may I see
that I'm worth all the love of the Son of God,
who laid down his life just for me.*

And the ring? After a good 15 minutes of searching and help from the front-end loader man we found it. With a look of pure joy, he held it up, "This is it. I have found it!" He was so grateful. And we finally got to have our ice creams.