I don’t know about you, but I love the folklore, movies, novels, and the occasional headline in our news, tell the story of buried treasure buried under an “X” on a secret map. The discovery of a shipwreck full of ancient gold coins makes me smile. We seem to have an inexhaustible imagination and interest in stories of searches for treasure hidden in secret caves, under the sea, or in forgotten vaults. Modern-day treasure hunters, armed with the latest gadgets to scan the beach for washed up nuggets, or dive the depths for submerged bullion, do occasionally find that lost treasure trove—hence the headlines, and the wonder within our hearts whether we just might stumble across a hidden treasure ourselves, one day. (I’ve never been more fortunate than to find a rusty nail or a bottle cap!)

Matthews’ Gospel today, gives us a set of brief parables told by our Lord. Unlike many of the parables of Jesus, which were more extended stories with plotlines and surprise endings, (like the Good
Samaritan and the Prodigal Son), these short parables come hurling at us with rapid-fire staccato. The Kingdom of Heaven is like this . . ., and like this . . ., and like this. Treasure found in a field, a rare pearl, a net full of fish, a homeowner emptying out his storeroom. What has the Kingdom of Heaven to do with these varied images? We barely have time to think about each one before the next one is upon us. These are not stories; they are one-liners. They are images whizzing past us like landscapes glimpsed from a fast moving train. What are we to make of this teaching Jesus gives us, this string of parable pearls?

**First, Jesus may be saying to us that with the Kingdom of Heaven there is an element of hiddenness, of mystery, of search and discovery.** Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of Heaven, after all. The Kingdom of Heaven is the reign and realm of God, where God’s rule and will are lived out, where relationships are marked by justice and love, where ego is sacrificed for the greater good, where communion with God and each other is more important than personal gain and accomplishment. Ah, that sounds heavenly, doesn’t it? And it is. **But**
it can happen on earth as well. As Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.”

How could Jesus describe the indescribable? How could he open our minds to see what we have never imagined? He used metaphor, simile, and parable. He takes what we know—fields, pearls, fish, household goods—and allows these everyday earthly items to become stained glass windows through which heavenly light might shine. He talks in slanted language, not direct scientific precise language, much as we do when we write poetry to describe feelings of love, or use expressions of art to convey deep emotions. Even this slanted language is part of the hiddenness of the Kingdom, requiring the hearer to think outside the box, to stare again at the mundane and ordinary, to search for deeper meaning than lies on the surface. Not everyone is willing to do that kind of work.

The second thing these parables teach us, the Kingdom of Heaven can be found, and there is great joy when we do so. Yes, the
Kingdom requires some diligence and searching, but it can be found.
The buried treasure in the field, the pearl of great price, the good fish in
the net, the household treasures in the attic—all of them are found in
these parables, and the joy in that discovery is palpable because in each
case the discovery came after careful, often strenuous, work. In each of
these brief parables, the treasure is found, but only because someone was
paying attention, noticing or searching for that which many others may
have passed without recognition.

Makes you wonder, what treasure of insight, of relationship, of
service might we be missing, walking past every day; all because we are
not looking, searching, or open to the possibility and potential hidden the
midst of the ordinary moments of our lives. When we find it—whether
the love of our lives, an insight that changes our perspective, the calling
and purpose that sets our hearts on fire—oh, the joy to find that!

And this is the third thing these parables teach us. The
Kingdom of Heaven often buries its treasure in plain sight, the
extraordinary hidden among the ordinary. Like rare authentic diamonds lying inconspicuously in tray beside the costume jewelry, or a lump of gold ore nestled next to common river rocks at the bottom of a stream, the Kingdom of Heaven is most likely “hidden” in the open, available to anyone who has the discernment to see it, and to practice it. Could it be that Jesus uses such ordinary comparisons in his parables because he wants us to realize that the Kingdom of Heaven is not locked up in a mountaintop monastery, or beneath the altar of a cathedral encased in a vault? It can be seen, and experienced, in the ordinary places of our lives. God comes to us, all the way to us. That is the essential message of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ… .He was born in an ordinary stable, and raised by a poor family. Jesus himself was God’s extraordinary presence hidden in plain sight. His entrance to this world, and his upbringing, was so very plain, so very ordinary, that most people simply overlooked him.

Could it be that the smile of a infant, the wonder on the face of a child, the beauty of a sunset, the unexpected gesture of generosity, the
joy of a wedding, the warmth of an embrace at an airport—could it be
that all of these might be windows through which the Kingdom of
Heaven can be seen? If we could only know how and where to notice,
or how to discern the extraordinary shining through the ordinary!

And that brings us the final idea Jesus may be teaching us in
these parables. The Kingdom of Heaven requires discernment,
wisdom, to be able to recognize the treasure of God when we see it.
In the Old Testament reading, we heard of young King Solomon …
visited in a dream by God, and given the opportunity to ask for a wish to
be granted. It sounds like one of those stories of a genie in a bottle
granting wishes to the one who learned how to rub the lamp and set the
genie free. But in this case, God was testing the young monarch to
reveal his true character. When Solomon asked only for wisdom, that he
might rule the people with justice and compassion and courage, God was
so pleased that he also gave him the wishes that many of us would have
listed, given that same opportunity—wealth, long life, success. But it
was wisdom that became the lasting legacy of Solomon’s life. He chose
the most important thing—the wisdom to recognize the truth, the
treasure, the presence of God, which most other people overlook. This
is the gift Jesus is trying to give us in these parables. And it is the only
treasure map we will need to find the true treasure of life, both here and
hereafter.