Text: Matthew 13:44-52

**Introduction**

“Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

I don’t know if any of you have seen a play by the Reduced Shakespeare Company. It’s a comedy troupe that promises to give you a performance of all the Bard’s plays in two-ish hours. And they do indeed reduce his 37 plays to the time frame. And it is quite funny and amazingly hits all the beats. When I first saw it, it was magical enough – how could you do that work of compression – that I followed up and went to a presentation a couple of the writers of the troupe were doing. This is all pre-internet so it wasn’t just a youtube search. And what they said has stuck with me for a long time as something profound. It has even become a little inside family joke – or at least between me and David it has. There are only three stories in all the world. There is One Darn Thing After Another. There is Hero’s Journey. And There is The Jesus Story.

Now there are probably infinite variations – comedies and tragedies – off of each of them. But you can reduce all of Shakespeare to 2 hours, because you are ID’ing which story it is and just filling in the names, some props and some jokes.

The John Wick movies are One Darn Thing After Another. The first thing is they kill his dog. And as long as people like me are willing to pay 10 dollars to see John Wick kill people for killing his dog, we will have a never ending stream of follow on things happening. The very original one of these might be Hesiod’s poem Works and Days. One thing after another to keep your farm going.

The Hero’s Journey starts with Homer and Achilles and Odysseus. Now if you were forced to read the Odyssey you might think it was one thing after another, but each of those experiences prepare Odysseus to get back home – more on home later. Achilles and the Iliad is the tragedy version. The hero’s journey to secure everlasting fame. And the vast majority of movies or shows today are some type of hero’s journey.

The last genuinely new story was the Jesus story.

**Christology**

Jesus himself has been telling these stories – these parables that we’ve been meditating on for the past couple of weeks. And today he completes that sermon.

Ever since the late 19th and early 20th century – blame some old Germans by the names of Bultmann and Jeremias – it has been drilled in standard interpretation to say that the parables can only have one referent or meaning. Forget the 1800 years of Christian history – or Jesus’ words about old and new being brought out – that held Scripture as polysemous – holding many levels of meaning. And because of that intellectual dogma, we’ve tended to take the One True Meaning of these parables today in the way that our sermon hymn does – one thing is needful. Now if you are locked into that One True Meaning, to me at least that is pure law. And not exactly a law that I’d like. You mean finding the one thing needful is akin to finding buried treasure. I might have a better chance of winning the lottery. And maybe I should follow Achilles in search of fame. But it was this parable interpretation, mashed together with preaching necessity and I like to think my Lutheran-ness that forced me to leave behind those old Germans and dig deeper in the treasury to pull something out.

And the first thing when looking at the parables today that I think we have to face is that we should have been trained by the prior two parables – the Sower and the Wheat and Weeds – to see the man at the center of them as God or specifically Jesus. When he’s done telling these Jesus turns to the disciples and asks “Have you understood all these things?” And of course the disciples immediately answer “Yes.” Which I’m sure is what we’d all do. I mean I’m not going to tell Jesus publicly “uh, can you repeat that, I’m a little slow.” I’ll just corner him later in the house and ask a question. But then we immediately go off and place ourselves as the main character looking at a field…or looking for pearl. And think it all hangs on us.

But if we understood what came before, we are not the main character. God is. What is the Kingdom of Heaven like? A man who finds a treasure hidden in a field, who with joy goes and sells everything he has to buy the field. Who is the man? Christ. What is the field? The world. Who or what is the treasure? YOU. Equality with God. Sell it, not something to be grasped, and he became incarnate. The power and the glory? Sell it, born in a stable, on the run. Jesus sold everything that was his from before all time, to find, to claim and redeem you. And he did this with joy. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross.

That’s the Jesus story. And that is what makes it different than the Hero’s journey of Achilles. Achilles also dies in pursuit of what he was after. But what was He after? Eternal fame, for himself. And we today still say his name. Although when Odysseus visits him in the underworld, Achilles isn’t happy with his bargain. But even the other half of the deal the gods once offered Achilles - a long happy forgotten life - was still for himself. The Jesus story is giving everything away to unbury the treasure lost in the world – to find what was lost. The Jesus story is the hero’s death completely for the good of the other. And nobody had ever contemplated that. Had even imagined it. Until God did it.

And he did it for you.

And to this day he throws that net into the sea gathering fish of every kind.

**Moral**

Within that Jesus story, we can redeem the Hero’s Journey. Or maybe we can talk about it opening up for everyone.

If we are after everlasting fame, I’ve got bad news for you, Achilles took it, and you aren’t Achilles.

If you are after the world, you should go watch Citizen Kane. The Billionaires of another time longing for Rosebud. I’d love to know what the X is marking Elon Musk’s rosebud.

Likewise any deal that Satan might offer you, or whatever your flesh desires right now. Setting out in pursuit of those, even if you get them, proves anticlimactic. The Journey was a waste.

You were lost and now you have been found. Are you going to go back to those selfish quests?

I hope not. The only worthy quest now is the Kingdom. The only hero’s journey is the one under the cross.

And that call has been opened to everyone in Christ. In the love of Christ we are more than conquerors. Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers…nor any of the things that will try and stop you from living the Christian life – the only real hero’s journey – can do it.

If you were telling these parables from our standpoint you’d have to reverse them. We have already been given the treasure. Do we trade it for a field – the world? We have the one pearl of incomparable worth. Do we sell it? Or do we hold on and move forward in faith?

**Eschatological**

The end of the hero’s journey is always the return home. The two big questions are:

1. What has made it home and
2. What type of home have you arrived at?

In the Jesus story, what has made it home is something greater than what set out. Jesus left the Father’s heaven not thinking that equality with God was something to be grasped and returned the firstborn of many brothers. He returned with a heritage, a people, a treasure. What might have been a serene heaven he left, he returned to wedding feast that has no end. You can compare that to the shade of Achilles that returns. The fame returns, but not the man.

The hero’s journey eats you, while in the Christian life, more will be given.

That return home is an eschatological point. And we can probably tell stories of men and women that were completely consumed by the world and their desires, such that nothing of the person makes it home. But it is really that second question: what type of home have you arrived at I want to ponder as a last point.

The parables that have a homecoming all say something like ours today. The angels will separate the evil from the righteous. The hero always returns home. And I think the parables that Jesus tells are consistent with that. The question is what home has our journey formed us for? Are we welcomed into our Father’s tents? Or sent to the furnace? This life has formed us for our home.

We have either been conformed to Christ, or we have been conformed to the evil one.

We are all on our way home. Do we arrive with the pearl of faith, or have we sold it and arrive weeping?

**Conclusion**

The Lutheran tradition is not big on the personal testimony. Part of the reason is a higher view of the office of the ministry. Summarized in the Augsburg Confession that “no one should publicly teach or administer the sacraments unless they are rightly called.” That rightly called usually meaning called and ordained. Jesus’ words about “the scribe who has been trained” could certainly find application here.

But St. Peter also tells us that we all have to be ready to give an account…a reason for the faith. Even if it never ends up for public profession, if your kids might be the only ones who ever hear it. It is a worthy bit of piety to think about how you would tell your story.

Is it one thing after another, yet Jesus saved me as from a house on fire?

Is it a hero’s journey? Still trying to figure out just who is the hero and what is the destination?

Or has your story been conformed to Christ and the cross? How would you bring out things old and new?