

# **The Pearl of Great Value**

## ***A Sermon on Christian Stewardship***

*Delivered by David H. Knight  
(using a story told by Bishop "Bill" Stough)*

Jesus come and set thy soul ablaze,  
to give and give, and give again what God hath given thee;  
to spend thyself nor count the cost to serve right gloriously  
the God who gave all worlds that are, and all that are to be. Amen  
*(from hymn 209)*

My text for this morning is from Matthew's gospel in which he tells the wonderful story of the pearl merchant. *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all he had and bought it."* (Matthew 13:45)

Some years ago now, I had the privilege of attending a week at the College of Preachers in Washington D.C. then housed on the campus of the Washington National Cathedral. Bishop "Bill" Stough, former Bishop of Alabama, was then serving on the staff of the Episcopal Church headquarters in New York, was the leader of this week at the College of Preachers. He was a great preacher and a wonderful story teller. He told us a story that illustrated this parable in Matthew's gospel that has remained etched in my memory and I want to share it with you this morning. *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding*

*one pearl of great value, he went and sold all he had and bought it.”*

*(Matthew 13:45)*

In this story he told about a merchant who not only dealt in fine jewelry but was also a collector himself of fine pearls. For a long time, this merchant had been in search for a particularly exquisite pearl. Like many a collector he set his mind on finding that pearl at all cost. One day, he was in a big city on the East Coast driving along a street lined with fine shops. As he was driving slowly by he caught sight of a fine jewelry store. With luck there was a parking space in front. Hopeful that he might find something special inside the store he parked his car, got out and looked in the window. There on display were some very fine pieces of jewelry. There had to be more inside. He would just have to go in. He opened the door and stepped inside. Behold, there before his eyes was a display case, and in that case was a pearl the likes of which he had never seen before. It was—well—it was simply the most beautiful pearl he could ever imagine owning. In fact, it was the very one for which he had been searching for a very long time.

As he stood there transfixed at the sight before his very eyes, a very dignified man came out from a room behind the display and said, “May I help you sir?”

“Oh yes, ah, is that—ah—that pearl for sale? It’s very beautiful.”

“Yes, it’s for sale.”

“Oh good! It’s so very beautiful, very beautiful. Ah, how, ah, much will it cost?”

“It will cost everything you have but it can be yours.”

“Oh yes, yes, I see,” as he took out his wallet and started to count his money.

“Oh don’t count your money, just give it to me, and, ah, any loose change in your pocket as well, Just, just give it to me.”

“Oh yes, of course!” as he hands the money over.

“And do you have any other money?”

“Oh yes, not with me but I have some money in the bank.”

“Do you have a savings account?”

“Yes, I have a savings account.”

“I’ll take that, all of it.”

“Yes, yes, of course.”

“Do you have investments?”

“Yes, I have some investments.”

“I’ll take those investments, all of them.”

“Oh yes, of course.” (You see, he wanted that pearl more than anything else in the world.) “And now, the pearl is mine?” He was beside himself with joy at finally being able to have this pearl, but the man behind the counter asked further.

“Do you have a car?”

“Oh yes, that Dark Blue Metallic Buick parked out front is mine.”

“I’ll take that too; just, just give me the keys.”

“Oh yes, yes.”

“And do you have a house?”

“Yes, I have a nice house out on the Main Line where I live with my family.”

“I’ll take your house. Is that all the real estate you own?”

“Well, ah, no, I, ah, have a summer house on the Outer Banks.”

“I’ll take that too.” Just get me those deeds to your properties. Now, you say you have a family?”

“Yes, yes, I have a wonderful wife. . .”

“I’ll take your wife. And you have children, you say?”

“Yes, ah, I have four fine children, two boys and two girls.”

I’ll take them also.”

“Ah yes, I see.”

“Is that it? Is that all you have”

“Yes, that’s all I have.”

“OK now, that’s fine. The pearl is now yours. You may have it.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you very much. You see, I have wanted this pearl for a very long time and I would give anything—anything—to have it.” He stood there holding the pearl he had just bought with everything he had. He then handed back to the man behind the counter to safely wrap it so he could take it with him. The man behind the counter left for a few moments and returned from the back room having carefully wrapped the pearl for safe transport. Ecstatic with his purchase the pearl merchant turned to leave the store. He opened the door to carry with him his new purchase, the pearl of great value. As he opened the door the man behind the counter spoke once again. He said, “Remember that money you gave me for the pearl you just bought?”

“Oh yes, I remember that money,” as he clutched the package in his hand.

“Well, you may have that money to use if you will use it wisely and if you will set aside a meaningful portion of it to help other people.”

“Oh thank you, thank you very much. I will do that. Thank you.”

“Remember that savings account?”

“I remember that savings account”

“You may have use of that savings account if you will save it wisely, and perhaps, from time to time you will come upon a situation where some of your savings could make a difference in the lives of others who are in great need. And those investments—do you remember those investments?”

“Oh yes, I remember those too.”

“Well, you may use your investments if you invest them wisely as well, and if you invest them only where ethical policies are practiced, and with companies that do not take advantage the poor and disadvantaged, and if you will designate a meaningful portion of them at some point for some worthy endeavor that will help, perhaps, to alleviate human suffering, or to help those in need, or to enrich the lives of other people. Do you understand?”

“Oh yes, I understand. Thank you, thank you very much.”

“And do you remember that Buick?”

“Oh yes, yes, it’s a very nice car, I remember that Buick.”

“Well, I’m going to let you use that car, you see, but you must use it from time to time to give someone a ride that doesn’t have a car who needs a ride to the doctor, or maybe somebody who needs a ride to church, or shopping for groceries or something like that. Do you understand?”

“Oh yes, I understand, thank you. Thank you so very much.”

“Do you remember that house on the Main Line where you and your family lived?”

“Oh yes, I remember my house.”

“Well, you may continue to live in that house, but you must offer hospitality to others from time to time and not only just to your friends, but also to someone you might hear of who needs a place to stay for a while.”

“I understand.”

“And your summer house on the Outer Banks. Do you remember that house?”

“Oh yes, I remember that house.”

“Well, you can continue to use that house if, on occasion you will let someone live there who might need a place to stay, maybe somebody who has had a rough time and needs to get away for a short period of time for a retreat for a while.”

“Oh thank you, thank you so much.”

“And your wife, do you remember your wife?”

“Oh yes, I remember my lovely wife.”

“Well, you can live with your wife if you will continue to treat her with respect and honor her and do all that is within your power to be faithful only to her as long as you both shall live. Do you understand?”

“Oh yes, yes I understand. Thank you so much. Thank you so much.”

“And those four children, those two fine sons and those two fine daughters. Do you remember them?”

“Yes, yes, I remember them as well.”

“Well, the deal is that you can continue to have them to bring up if you will raise them with love and care, and if you will spend enough time apart from work with them, respecting them and as they grow being able to let them find their way without controlling them too much, and being there for them when they need you, and most of all enjoying the precious moments you have with them for they will grow up fast. Do you understand?”

“Oh yes, I really understand. Thank you so very much. Thank you. Thank you”

“But do you really understand?”

“Oh yes, I really understand.”

“Then the pearl is yours, you may have it for your very own.”

“Oh thank you so much, thank you.”

Now the question for you and for me is, “Do you and I understand? Do you and I *really* understand?”

*With gratitude and humble trust we bring our best to thee to serve thy cause and share thy love with all humanity. O thou who gavest us thyself in Jesus Christ thy Son, help us to give ourselves each day until life's work is done.*

Amen.