

Matthew 13:44-52

Comfort Food, Water, and Words

Sometimes, you just need a word of encouragement. Sometimes, you just need to be built up. Sometimes, you just need some comfort.

The disciples needed that comfort and encouragement. Things were starting to change, and not for the better. For a while, Jesus' popularity had grown and grown. He did miracles. He taught with authority. He healed people. He cast out demons. The crowds got bigger.

Then Jesus' teaching began to get more challenging. He was calling for deep commitment and a change in people's worship. The religious leaders were turning against him. Jesus challenged the way they did church back then and the ways the leaders had used their positions for power and money. You can imagine what reaction that brought.

Things were getting downright hostile. The crowds were getting smaller. Resistance to Jesus was becoming threatening. Can you imagine the disciples' reaction? "Hey, what's going on here? This isn't how it's supposed to be. The crowds are supposed to get bigger. If the Romans start to show their muscle, Jesus should just flick them away. Opposition should be crushed. The Pharisees and priests who get in the way, well, they'll be replaced."

But that wasn't happening. The disciples were feeling vulnerable, even attacked. Some might have been wondering, Did we sign up for this? Discouraged. Confused. Afraid. The disciples needed some encouragement, some comfort, some reassurance.

Do you ever feel this way? That this isn't the way it's supposed to be with those who follow Jesus?

An article in *The Wall Street Journal*, says that Christianity is the most persecuted faith in the world. In the Middle East, especially in Muslim countries, Christians are second-class citizens with few rights and protections. Churches are burned down. Pastors and priests are beaten or imprisoned. That's frightening.

It's not that bad in the United States, but you can feel the shift that's been going on. In some college classes, professors openly attack what we believe. And those professors who are Christians

may not get a promotion, tenure, or published because of what they teach about creation or life. Jesus' name is systematically being removed from everyday life. That's discouraging.

Perhaps you're embarrassed by what's going on in the Church itself. Consider the scandals with embezzlement or sexual misconduct involving Church leaders that hit the news. All that makes you drop your head.

Or it could be the churches that have closed for lack of members. Or the empty seats in a pew, or empty pews in a service. The crowds are getting smaller and smaller, while those who say they have no religious affiliation – the NONES -- are growing in number in our country. That's hard to take.

We can feel just like the disciples did back then. We are confused. We wonder. We're discouraged. It's not supposed to be this way. We need a word of encouragement. We need some comfort. We need to be reassured.

So Jesus tells the disciples—and us—two parables. They're very short parables. A man finds a treasure in the field and gives up everything to buy the field. A man finds a precious pearl. He gives up everything to buy the pearl.

Now who is the man, and who is the treasure? We know we can't buy our way into God's presence. Heaven isn't something that we could get by giving up everything. So the man is Jesus. He will give up everything. He will give up his place in glory. He will give up his power and prestige to be born in this world. He will give up his popularity and safety to complete his mission. He will give up his life. He will give up everything for the precious pearl, for the treasure.

Know what that means? The disciples are the treasure in Jesus' eyes. They are the pearl he wants so much that he'll give everything. And not just the disciples; we, too, are the treasure in Jesus' eyes. He gives up everything for us too.

Jesus tells these parables to give a word of encouragement. He wants to reassure us that what's going on around us is not the way things really are. He treats us with that special dignity that comes from being God's wonderful creations, formed in our mothers' wombs. Jesus treats every person with a total sanctity of life. He will sort things out at the end of time. Those who have persecuted the Church will find out who is Lord of all. Those who've done evil in his name will learn that their works did not

please him. And those who are faithful to the end will rejoice in his glory as he comes back for us.

But until that Last Day, we need encouragement. We need some comfort. You know the term “comfort food.” When people are feeling down, they eat a certain food to make them feel better. Perhaps it’s mac and cheese. Perhaps a favorite dessert. Or hot buttered popcorn. Or chocolate. But for us in the Church, Jesus gives us the ultimate comfort food. We go up to the Lord’s Table and receive everything he gave for us. His body. His blood. Given and shed for us. We are welcomed to eat this comfort food and know that Jesus is truly present in our lives just as he was with the disciples so long ago. Risen from the dead. Alive. Working his wonderful gifts of life and salvation in us. Now that’s a comfort.

Some people like to use water to feel better. A hot bath. A hot tub. A vacation on the beach. We have water too. In the baptismal water, Jesus came to us and said, “You are mine. I gave everything, paid it all, so that you will always be precious in my sight.” In the baptismal liturgy we welcome the newly baptized with these words: “In Holy Baptism God the Father has made you a member of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and an heir with us of all the treasures of heaven in the one holy Christian and apostolic Church”. Now that’s encouraging, comforting.

And there are times we just need a word of encouragement, something to reassure us that despite what we see happening in the world, in the country, in the Church, Jesus still sees us as his pearls of great price. Listen to these passages.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:9)

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Is 43:1)

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate

hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. (Col 3:12)

Sometimes, you just need a word of encouragement. Sometimes, you just need to be built up. Sometimes, you just need some comfort. Today you’ve heard it. You are Jesus’ treasure! He gives up everything for you, and Jesus provides the encouragement we need with comforting food, water, and fantastic words.

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July 30, 2017
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