

Psalm 84:1-4 and Matthew 13:44-46

July 29, 2018

## A HIDDEN TREASURE AND A FINE PEARL

This morning's sermon is going to be a little different. Today I'm sort of like the opening act, warming up the audience—that's you—before the main act—that would be Pam Joy—comes on stage to talk with you. Pam is going to fill you in about something the Ministry of Members, Friends and Church Life is attempting to do—something I believe will be a blessing for our church. And then Pam will enlist your help and ask for your valuable input, to help the Ministry of Members, Friends and Church Life move forward with this plan it came up with.

Let me begin by saying I chose several of Jesus' Kingdom parables for this worship service, and with apologies to our Lord and a deep reverence for him and his original stories, I adapted three of them to help spur your imagination and kindle a flame of enthusiasm in you.

We all know the parable of the mustard seed. Our Lord said, "Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." Using that as a template, here is a little parable about our church.

"The First Congregational Church of Scarborough is like a mustard seed, which a group of people planted in this town 290 years ago. Although it is small compared to congregations like "The Rock" or "East Point," yet when it grows in faith, love and service to God and our neighbor, it becomes a vibrant church so that people come and sit in in our pews."

Here is Jesus' parable of the hidden treasure, as revised to speak a bit more directly to our faith community.

"The First Congregational Church of Scarborough is like a treasure hidden in a field. When people find it, they sometimes keep it concealed and others can't see how wonderful it is and the positive things it has to offer; but they know the value of their discovery, and in their joy they give their time and money to support the church."

Finally, here is an adapted version of the parable of the valuable pearl. "Again, the First Congregational Church of Scarborough is like a merchant who is looking for fine pearls. When that merchant discovers the true worth of this faith community, they invest in it and rejoice in its value to them."

There are two points I'm trying to get across with my adapted parables. First, our church is a precious gem, a treasure of great value to those who know about us and what we're about. And second, there are a lot of people from whom this church is hidden and who know very little about us. I believe that, to those people who know little or nothing about us, the First Congregational Church of Scarborough is a hidden treasure buried in plain sight here on the Black Point Road.

So many people drive, bike or walk by us every day, and our church barely registers with them. Sure, they might enjoy our sign out front and watch for the cute or meaningful messages to change. And tourists stop to take pictures of our building because we're one of those quaint, traditional New England churches you see on postcards. But they don't realize how valuable this church is to us who are a part of this congregation. They don't know that we're much more than just a building with a sign out front carrying appealing messages. We're a loving, caring community, and the Ministry of Members, Friends and Church Life thinks we need to do some educating to raise people's awareness of who we are, what we're about, and the blessings of belonging to our community. That's where we would like your help. Because, you see, before we raise people's awareness and tell them who we are and why we're a blessing; before we can get that message out to other people in the community, we need to define that message and know for ourselves what our church offers.

The index cards we put in your bulletins this morning are so you can write down and tell us why our church is a blessing to you, and how it might be a blessing for others. And then the Ministry of Members, Friends and Church Life are going to tabulate your responses and use them to help formulate our message to the community at large, so we can let them know we're here and would love for them to come see us—or if they've been here before, to come see us again.

I'm going to hand things over to Pam Joy in a moment so she can ask for your help in this plan to make our church more noticeable and desirable for people who might be looking for a faith community to become part of. But before I do, I want to grease your wheels a little and get your thinking muscles warmed up to help prepare you. This is what I'd like you to do. Please take a few moments now and imagine that you're involved in a conversation with someone—it could be a stranger or a friend, they could be old or young, male or female, it doesn't matter. But one thing you do know about this imaginary person you're with is that they have never been to our church before. Or they've been gone for a long enough time that they've sort of forgotten about us.

But they want to learn more about the First Congregational Church of Scarborough because maybe they're searching for a faith community to belong to or considering returning and rekindling their relationship with us.

So, imagine you're talking to this person who is unfamiliar with our faith community, because either they've never been here before or they haven't been here for a long time, and he or she asks you a simple and direct question.

"Why should I come to your church?"

What are our strengths? What are some of the positive things you could share about why you're moved to continue your relationship with this church and support it? How would you respond to them if they asked, "Why should I come to your church?" What does it have to offer?"

Using only a few words or a brief sentence, is there something you could tell them that might inspire them to come to our church?" I would really like you to think about that for a moment, because the answers you give may be the very answers we need to communicate to people outside our walls so they will be enticed to come meet us and discover for themselves the hidden treasure, the fine pearl we've already discovered, called the First Congregational Church of Scarborough. Amen.