Hidden Treasure in Dublin

Andrew Gonoude 9 April 2019



In Matthew 13, the Kingdom of God is likened to a field with hidden treasure, where the owner poured his resources into buying the field, just to acquire the gold.I have thought of this parable a lot. Especially the week my wife and I were invited once again to spend some time at Firebrand Christian Church in Dublin.

Dublin – the same city where in 1759, a budding entrepreneur spent his entire inheritance purchasing a 9,000 year lease in order to buy a run-down, disused factory. With the chief aim of securing inheritance rights to the pure spring water that flowed through the factory from the nearby Wicklow Mountains. He saw the potential, built a world-famous brand, and became a multi-millionaire philanthropist.If the Matthew 13 parable had been about him, then the factory was his field and water was his hidden treasure. However, we know that the parable is about the Kingdom of God and not about physical riches.

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So, there we were again in Ireland. We were invited for what was now our fifth visit to Firebrand, to a 3-day countryside retreat, followed by their usual Sunday morning meeting in Tallaght, south-west of Dublin. Although I have travelled to many fields and ploughed a lot of them, I don't think I've ever discovered gold on a scale like this.

I can easily relate to Firebrand as a modern-day example of the parable of the hidden treasure. The church also reminds me of Jesus talking to the woman at the well, where he describes ''Living Water''. In fact, Scripture is full of suitable Kingdom references to water, such as 'there is a river that makes glad the city of God' (Psalm 46:4). 'Uncle' Will Marais often talks about the work of God and the way of God, and seeing them in harmony as I did in Dublin is quite overwhelming. When writing this post about our time with Firebrand, I confess I felt rather like the new field owner or the woman at the well – both rejoicing over the new discovery of living water.

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To describe the church (in staying with the water theme), I would quote Matthew 11: 'Come to me all you who are thirsty' (Isaiah 12:3). It would not be out of place for Firebrand to hang that sentence as a banner above their door. Their events are gospel-centered and often preceded by street outreaches. There is a common thread from the pulpit: Christ crucified, deliverance, healing, freedom. Sermons are delivered in plain language, without 'Christianese' ambiguity. The model is refreshingly simple and fruitful, with the fruit being seen in people getting saved on a regular basis.

The hunger and joy of the church is tangible. Meetings contain sold-out praise and worship, testimonies, gospel messages and alter calls. The presence of God is very evident. Many newcomers find Jesus through the outreach programmes and through friends of new believers who bring them along too. So it is no exaggeration to say that their growth is most definitely organic.

They convert 'decisions' into disciples with regular mid-week prayer meetings and bible studies, often twice weekly, in their homes. Events are well attended and marked by love for each other and a hunger to grow in God.

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There are always needs, as with all churches, and the people have an Acts 2:42 mindset. Listening to their journeys and testimonies, you can't help but be inspired and moved. Some are awe-inspiring, others are simply jaw-dropping. I have been left shaken, tearful and speechless by what I have heard. Sometimes I am just deeply humbled to hear what some people have been through. Of course, that is not true for everyone there, but trust me, the statistics are high.

The leaders, Tommy and Brenda Hanrahan, are a model of servant leadership. They probably would not appreciate me drawing attention to them instead of to Jesus, but I must honour their leadership and their sheer weight of pastoral care. They will have many sons and daughters in heaven.Their tireless love for Jesus' church is proof that hidden treasure is worth the investment (and their inheritance will last well beyond 9,000 years).

Luke 7:47 summarizes Firebrand perfectly: 'He who has been forgiven much loves much.'

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