

## What are You Worth?

Year C, Proper 9 – Luke 10:20

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, July 7, 2013

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

What are you worth? I suspect that when I asked that question, at least a few of you started to do some mental arithmetic, sizing up your financial balance sheet. Let's see, the house... or two. The car... or three. The stocks and bonds, the certificates of deposit. The artwork, the jewelry, the appliances, the furniture. All that's offset, of course, by the mortgages, the loan payments, the credit card bills.

What are you worth? Since you're sitting here in church this morning – even on a holiday weekend – I'm guessing some of you may have immediately gone somewhere other than the financial realm. Instead, you may have started listing your many accomplishments, your value in deeds and actions and involvement. Your spouse of thirty years – or eight. Your kids, whether grown and adding to your worth of accomplishment, or... somewhere still in process. Your contribution to the community, perhaps even the nation or the world. Your contribution to the church – especially *this* church. Of course, that's offset somewhat as well, but we'll leave that for a different kind of sermon on another day.

What are you worth? Maybe some of you, like me, can remember a time when a preacher or a teacher or whoever, pointed out that when broken down into its constituent chemical components, the human body isn't worth very much. I remember that at one time, some years ago, the total came to just a touch over ninety-three cents. With inflation and all, by now I suppose the figure has probably climbed to three bucks, or so. Of course, that doesn't take into consideration any gold fillings, electronic pacemakers or stainless steel joints you might happen to have picked up along the way.

What are you worth? According to the Gospel story, we are apparently of *enormous* worth. According to the story, we are apparently worth more than heaven itself. According to the story, we are apparently worth the sacrifice of God's own son! That's really good news, of course. The question is... why? Who are *we* that God should consider us so highly? How is that we should rate such grace? How is that we should rate such... consideration? Why are we worth so much?

This is the question the disciples ended up confronting in this morning's Gospel lesson. Jesus had sent seventy of his followers out on a short-term mission trip. He had sent them into the hiways and byways, into the towns and villages and countryside, into homes and marketplaces and synagogues. He had sent them out to spread the wonderful news that the ancient prophecies had come to pass, that their longings had been fulfilled, that the Kingdom of God had come near. He had sent them out with realistic expectations, with warnings about what to expect and with instructions on how to cope with disappointment and rejection.

When they came back, though, they had not been disappointed, but triumphant. They had come back *glowing* with what could be done by the power of God. "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" They had come back rejoicing in their accomplishments. And Jesus rejoiced right along with them that God was able to do his work in the world in and through them. He rejoiced with them that through them, the sick were made well. Through them, the blind were given sight. Through them, the lame were made to walk again. This was the dream team. These were the ones who had experienced the power, who had seen with their own eyes that the Kingdom of God had *indeed* come near. These were the ones who in the power of the Resurrection, would continue to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. These are the ones that in the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, extended that short-term mission trip into centuries unconceived, until whole societies, including our own, consider themselves Christian, even if we don't always act very much like it.

But in sharing their excitement, Jesus gave his disciples, his apostles, a reason to rejoice that went far beyond what they had accomplished. Although their mission was a success, their worth was not bound

to their success. Their *real* value in the grand scheme of heaven, he said, their *real* value to the Kingdom of God, had little to do with what they had or had not accomplished, but with who they were. "Rejoice," Jesus said, "that your names are written in heaven." He called them to distinguish between doing and *being*. As mighty as their works done in his name might have been, their real value lay in the fact that they had been *declared* valuable by God.

Like the seventy, every one of us has been given a mission. It may be as grand as taking the message of the Kingdom of God to people in some far off land where they have literally never heard that Good News. Or *your* mission may be as mundane as loving that jerk in the cubicle next door. Whatever your call is, if you do it out of some sense that without it you will somehow not measure up, then you're missing the point. The truth is, you can't do something to capture God's attention or love. You already have it. What's more, you can't do anything that will turn God's attention and love away. God has *chosen* to love you. Even if you choose to turn your back on him, whatever you choose to do or not do, even if you choose to turn your back, God has chosen to love you, and there's nothing, not one thing you can do to change that.

When you do something really, really great, God loves you because your name is written in heaven. When you're slogging along, wondering if you're ever going to accomplish *anything*, God loves you because your name is written in heaven. When you really mess up, when you hurt those closest to you, when you wonder *yourself* how you could be so unloveable, so *worthless*, God loves you because your name is written in heaven.

From before time, God loved you enough to sing you into creation. When the right time had come, God loved you enough to be born himself into the human condition. And to put an end to the tyranny of sin and death, God loved you enough to carry your sins and mine to the hard wood of his cross and to bury them in the stone cold of his own grave.

You are worth far more than the sum of your component parts. You are worth far more than the sum of your deeds. You are worth far more than your bottom line. You are of *inestimable* worth - because God has declared it.

And that is Good News indeed.