

Unrecognized Value

Mark 8:27-38

Introduction

In 1991, Teri Horton was browsing at a San Bernardino thrift store. She found a 5'6" tall and 4' wide large canvas covered in colorful paint drips and splatters. Thinking that this ugly painting might be a good gag gift for a friend, she paid the \$5 asking price for the painting. As it turns out, her friend thought it was ugly, too, and refused to accept the gift. So Horton tried to sell it at a garage sale. At the garage sale an art teacher recognized it as a painting by abstract artist Jackson Pollock. Ms. Horton is currently asking \$50 million for the painting. When she bought it, she did not recognize its value.

At another garage sale nearly two decades ago, Rick Norsigian bought two boxes of glass-plate photography negatives for \$45, simply because he was drawn to the images of the Yosemite National Forest where he once worked. But after researching his purchase, Norsigian discovered that the negatives were the work of famed landscape photographer Ansel Adams. Norsigian is now expected to earn \$200 million from sales of the prints over the next 25 years. When he bought them, he did not recognize their actual value.

More recently when they were clearing out the home of their deceased parents, an British brother and sister who have chosen to remain anonymous discovered a 16-inch tall Chinese vase with an image of fish on it. They put the vase in a box along with a number of other Chinese ceramics souvenirs and took them to an auction house in London. An appraiser saw the vase and traced it to the royal family of an 18th-century Chinese emperor. Before the auction, the appraiser estimated the piece would sell for between \$1.3 million and \$1.9 million. But after a 30-minute bidding war the final purchase price was \$8.5 million. The siblings were stunned. They thought this was just another souvenir their parents had collected over the years. They in no way recognize its real value.

It makes you wonder, doesn't it, how often you have to recognize missed the value of something you have.

As you know, September is our stewardship month. Throughout this month we are developing our stewardship theme of:

"Walking ON in Grace."

It's theme that captures our memories of the walk taken by the people of this congregation 25 years ago as they relocated from 21 E. Harding Road to 1801 St. Paris Pike. Throughout the month we are asking ourselves a simple question: What does it mean for this congregation to "Walk on in Grace." We always want to be asking: "Where is God leading us now?"

In addition to being a vision question, that is also a value question. Our answer to that question will determine what we are willing to bring to the altar on Consecration

Sunday, September 29. Your gifts of your time, talent, treasure and testimony will reflect the value you see in the work of fulfilling the Great Commission given to the whole church worldwide and the specific portion of that mission given to our local Grace congregation.

Three times in today's Gospel reading Jesus raises the question of "value." The setting is Caesarea Philippi. When I was on sabbatical Wally Martinson preached a sermon about this region. He described it as a place where every desire you would ever have could be fulfilled ... every passion, every lust, every desire known to humanity is right there.

Pointing to all that surrounded them, Jesus raises three questions of value to His disciples.

QUESTION #1: WHAT IS FOLLOWING JESUS WORTH TO YOU?

Look at verse 34:

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Mark 8:34)

The honesty of Jesus in this moment is startling. Honesty has always been a characteristic of great leaders.

- When Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of England in WWII, all that he offered his fellow citizens was:

... blood, toil, tears and sweat. (Winston Churchill)

- When the great Italian patriot Garibaldi appealed for recruits, he offered these terms:

All our efforts against superior forces have been unavailing. I have nothing to offer you but hunger and thirst, hardship and death; but I call on all who love their country to join with me. (Guiseppe Garibaldi)

No one can ever say that Jesus pulled a "bait and switch" when He invited them to follow Him.

- Jesus has never tried to bribe His followers by promising an easy way ... no rose-colored glasses here.
- He tells His followers they must be ready to die for Him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls this truth "The Cost of Discipleship." Contrasting the cost to what he calls "cheap grace," Bonhoeffer writes:

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck

out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Following Jesus requires a daily recommitment of saying “no” to all that the world offers us and saying “yes” to the cross set before us. That is a very high cost. How is genuinely following Jesus worth to you? Do you recognize the value?

QUESTION #2: WHAT IS YOUR SOUL WORTH TO YOU?

Look at verses 35-36:

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Mark 8:35-36)

It is no secret that I have an ongoing battle with chocolate chip cookies. And chocolate cake with chocolate icing. And Schuler's chocolate iced cream filled donuts. And Reese's peanut butter cups. And other things that are not chocolate.

Not surprisingly, I also have an ongoing battle with diabetes. I once asked my doctor why I had diabetes, and he explained it to me like this:

When God creates you, He filled your pancreas with a lifetime supply of insulin. When it's gone, it's gone. You used yours all up on chocolate chip cookies.

So every day there is a battle that rages on. Is that cookie worth a spike in my blood sugar? Now, to be fully honest, most days the cookie wins that battle. I choose poorly.

Every day we all are challenged with choices related to our soul. We are encouraged by the popular culture and by the devil himself to choose:

- Success over integrity.
- Popularity over principle.
- Comfort over sacrifice.
- Momentary pleasure over eternity.

It's not a new challenge. Jesus faced it when He spent those 40 days in the wilderness. Remember? After tempting Jesus to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger, and tempting Him to do a flashy miracle on demand ...

The devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” (Matthew 4:8-9)

It is always easier to choose the thing right in front of us without regard to the long-term costs. What is your soul worth? Do you recognize its value?

QUESTION #3: WHAT IS THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS WORTH?

Verse 31:

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)

Every once in a while I will get an offer for a FREE GIFT. It costs absolutely nothing. Except for shipping and handling. Oh, and a 12-month over-priced subscription. But the gift is free.

- It's not free. I end up paying for it if I accept it.

The sign on the Meijer shelf tells me a product is Buy-One-Get-One-Free.

- It's not free. The price of the first one is jacked up so, I end up paying for both.

Economist Milton Friedman taught us that:

There is no such thing as a free lunch. (Milton Friedman)

We Christians like to think of our salvation as being free. We quote verses like:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— (Ephesians 2:8)

Or

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

But there is no such thing as a free lunch or a free gift. While salvation is indeed free to us, somebody had to pay for it. And that was Jesus.

God demonstrated His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... the righteous for the unrighteous, that we might be made right with God. (Romans 5:8 and 1 Peter 3:18)

What is your salvation worth to you? When is the last time you thought about how much it cost – not you, but God. What is the value of something like that?

APPLICATION

Walking on in Grace means recognizing the value of what we have in Christ. Walking on in Grace as a congregation means that we must always pursue ministry that matches what God values. Because if we don't value what Jesus values, it's hard to walk on with Him.

Your checkbook and your calendar never lie. How you spend your life, be it money or time, says something about you. It tells others something about your values.

As a congregation we are constantly looking at what goes onto our calendar and what we spend our money on. We need to do that as individual Christians too.

Sometimes we – both individually and corporately – can become so accustomed to what we have that we underestimate its value – just like a painting or a Chinese vase.

- Sometimes we can pass the responsibility on to others. “Let them do it.”
- Or we can miss the value of what we contribute. “My gifts don't matter all that much.”

But as we walk on in Grace, let us continue to our whole lives show our Lord and our world how very much we value our faith and God's mission in this world.

Amen.