

Sermon: What Are You Worth?
Text: Luke 12:22-34
Date: Sunday, August 11, 2019
Preacher: Rev. Becky Stephens

I was speaking with someone a week or so ago. They were telling me about a lawyer, who left a high paying firm in order to provide legal help for the poor, many of whom are unable to pay him. Other times, I have heard about doctors who, after all the years of schooling and training, have become missionaries to places where there is little if any medical help. I would imagine most of us have heard stories such as these.

What is your reaction to them? I know what I frequently hear and say, “Wow! That’s amazing,” or “What a great way to spend one’s life! How wonderful! What an awesome person.”

What I don’t usually hear or say to myself is, “It’s so wonderful and awesome that I think I’ll do the same thing myself.” If we hold such high esteem for this kind of “selfless giving”...if it causes us to “ooh and awe”...if it brings with it just a tinge of envy...why is it that so many of us are not doing more of it?

Or think about the persons who give great sums of money or great percentages based on their salary to the church. We really admire them for this, do we not? And if it weren’t for the “cheerful givers” we would have no building in which to worship and no money to pay the bills, nothing to send to missionaries around the world, and no cash whatsoever to do ministry right here! Yet, how many of us tithe? How many of us give at least 10 % of our income to the church?

This used to be an overwhelming and scary thought to me. “10% of my income?!!!” “If I do that, how will I pay my bills?” “If I do that, how will I afford to spend and buy things for myself and my family?” But you know what? Like so many testimonies from others who tithe, I have found it so true that I don’t miss the money one bit!!! Giving 10% doesn’t stop me from being able to pay my bills. And I am still able to provide for my family and buy things we need and things we just want. The only thing that generous giving does do is increase my faith, and bring me a better sense of self-worth! It also, helps me to manage, better, the money I do have.

Who would have think it? It doesn’t necessarily make sense in the worldly way of looking at things, but it makes a lot of sense in the Kingdom Way!!! “O you of little faith!...how much more valuable you are than birds!...seek [God’s] kingdom and these things will be given to you as well...provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out...a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Has anyone ever asked you, “What are you worth?” What that question typically means is: “How much money do you have? What are your net assets?” Every year, one of the leading financial magazines publishes a list of the richest people in America. The “worth” of each of the persons who top the list runs into the billions of dollars. Yet, is this truly what they are worth—or merely an accounting of what they own?

We get our priorities so mixed up sometimes. We sometimes say, for example, that people who have declared bankruptcy are “ruined”—as though a shortage of money could ruin a part of God’s good creation! What do gamblers in the casinos say when they still have some money left? They say they’re “still alive!” The tragedy is that many folks actually believe this twisted way of thinking.

Recently I read what a few Wall Street financiers did on the day the stock market crashed in 1929. They leapt from the windows of their Manhattan skyscrapers! Was their joy and their family and friends really ruined by their financial problems? Did food suddenly taste less good, flowers smell less sweet? Was life really less worth living, because their financial castles had been demolished? Could it be that those tycoons of 1929 had lost their perspective? Did they really believe the lie that they were worth what they owned? I pray we don’t believe that lie as well!

Today, so many of us struggle not only under financial burdens—burdens of unpaid bills and heavy debts, but also burdens of low self-esteem. But Jesus tells us that we are worth infinitely more than what our checkbook balance indicates!!!

One of the powerful myths on which our society is based is that “we are what we own.” And it’s a cruel and oppressive myth! Deep down, we know it’s a lie, yet what a powerful influence it has all the same! Jesus has a word that counters this powerful myth. It is, “Do not be afraid.” “Do not be afraid,” Jesus says, “for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” Wow! Who could ask for anything more? Who could want anything more?

Christianity is a radically different way of looking at the world. We are to think differently because God enables us to see differently! And because we see differently, we are to live differently!!!

Within this passage of Scripture Jesus paints the world the way God wants us to see it and then invites us to take a peek at the canvas. And the greatest thing is that we are invited to jump right into that picture as well!!! “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

These are words of comfort, of transformation and of truth spoken to disciples who are anxious about food and clothing. Yet, how many of us really think of them as words of comfort? They can easily be changed, in our minds, from good news to bad news...and the end result is not all that different from the Wall Street tycoon jumping off the window ledge.

“We are what we own” is a dangerous and debilitating myth indeed!!! But, as with so many things, Jesus has a way of turning society’s myths completely around!!! We know from last week’s sermon that “you can’t take it with you,” or a new one, “a coffin has no pockets.” Our financial worth will not go with us to the throne of God.

We are told in 1 Peter, “You know that you were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” Who would have ever thought that silver

and gold are perishable, whereas the blood of Jesus shed 2,000 years ago lasts forever? It is neither what we own nor what we are, but what Jesus Christ has and can do through us which is decisive!!!

It's been said that, "today people are consumed by desires to buy things they don't need, with money they don't have, to impress people they don't like." That, my friends, is a form of hell! Freedom comes when we let go of those worries, when we let go of the desire for more and more, and live wholly and completely with an unwavering trust in God! That is the only way to be truly happy and satisfied! Even Christian believers can find themselves in a sort of hell, when we cling to the things of this world...and forget that the only thing that matters is Christ and Christ alone!!!

I met a man, who following a devastating tragedy in his life left his wealth behind and began walking the highways and byways. In doing this, he found that he was finally free to trust in Christ and Christ alone...for everything!!! After a year of ministering to other people he met along the way, helping to prevent troubled souls from committing suicide and leading many to Christ, he found himself faced with a job offer. "What am I to do?" he asked. "Is it time to settle back down or does God want me to continue my journey?" "I know what society expects, but I have never been so happy, so at peace, and felt so close to the Lord." "What should I do?"

I didn't have an answer for him. What would your answer be? It's interesting, desert mirages appear to be water, which is desperately needed. But they are an illusion—a trick of the sun, heat and sand. When you see a mirage, you head toward it, moving faster and faster; until finally, you plunge headlong right into it! But all you get is a mouthful of sand.

In a similar sense, there is a false spirituality of materialism, promising what it can never deliver. Even the slogans of advertising sound religious:

"Buick, Something to Believe In,"

"Miller, It Doesn't get any Better than This,"

"GE, We Bring Good Things to Life."

Is this not the essence of idolatry—a misdirected form of worship? How many of us are an advertiser's dream? How many of us sacrifice our souls for the mirage of glittering images, and all we get is a mouthful of sand? Oh, how weighed down we can become with the heavy chains and padlocks of materialism!

The lawyer who forfeits financial gain for the freedom of serving Christ...the doctor who works so hard in order to go off and be a missionary to those who cannot afford to pay him or her...these are the kinds of people who cause us to "ooh and aww."

"Life is more important than food, and the body more than clothes." "And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it." "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."

Our statement of net worth doesn't matter a hill of beans to God. So unimportant are running after financial gains that Jesus advises His disciples to give their worldly goods away, so they

will not be troubled by their crippling weight; so that they can indeed be free to serve Christ with complete trust, abandon and immeasurable joy! This is the Good News! And it can flash on like a light bulb for us when we take time to think about the Cross.

We can glory in the fact that, on the Cross, the decisive action of calculating our net worth has already been done. In the eyes of God, we are worth more than we can ever know!!! We are worth no less than Jesus' own blood, the blood He shed so that we might have life!

So, if anyone asks you "What are you worth..." or if you ever find yourself asking the same question of yourself or anyone else...Remember, that you are worth much, much more than all the silver and all the gold in the entire world...and so is, your neighbor next door, and the people living in the homes surrounding this church building. And that kind of treasure can never be stolen...and it can never go away, no matter how much of it you give away!!!