

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
June 12, 2016
Marley United Methodist Church, Glen Burnie MD

1 Kings 21: 1-10, (11-14), 15-21a

Psalm 5: 1-8

Galatians 2: 15-21

Luke 7:36 - 8:3**

What Are You Worth?

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

Marnie and I have recently bought and sold some big ticket items. We've bought a place in Florida so our camper is on the market. We now know exactly where we will be living when it comes time for us to make the move permanently. There is some comfort in that, but what I want to surface in today's sermon is a question we've had to ask ourselves several times in the last little bit. What is it worth?

We need the answer to that question to know what to ask for our camper — I mean you can't sell it if you don't put a price on it and so you ask yourself, what is it worth?

Then there is the place we bought. It is a Florida summer home rather than a 'house' as folks this far north are apt to envision, but it has the square footage and all the amenities needed to live in it full time year round and has the floor space of a 2 bedroom rancher. When we bought it we set the record for the most expensive sale in the park's history. Several people, including the Park Manager, advised us not to pay the asking price. So Marnie and I had to ask ourselves, what is it worth? Obviously we decided it was worth the asking price to us, so we happily paid it.

One truth that has become apparent to us in this process is that a thing, whether an item of clothing or a residence, is worth what you are willing to pay for it. You may not think a one-sided left-handed gazinta widget isn't worth much – but if it is the exactly the thing you've been wanting and needing for some time, you may be willing to pay a price that would make folks' eyebrows go up. What is something worth?

Another factor that plays into this is availability. If everybody here had a one-sided left-handed gazinta widget they didn't need, then the simple fact that there are so many is going to decrease the worth of any one widget, right? But, if nobody can remember having even seen a one-sided left-handed gazinta widget for, oh, at least 20 years – they don't make those anymore do they?, then the one you have can become worth a lot more, perhaps even priceless.

So, what is something worth? It is worth what you are willing to take for it, what you are willing to pay for it. And how much that is can depend on how many of them there are. Right?

Now, let's take that and kind of hang it right here so we can come back and get it when we're ready.

Now, let me ask, what are you worth? I know that is a very difficult question to answer – but it is also a very important one. If we don't decide what we're worth, then someone else will decide it for us and they are always looking for a discounted bargain.

How much are you worth? How we value ourselves will be one of the critical questions we will have to answer in this life. The answer will determine:

1. the choices we make in our relationships,
2. our interactions with others,
3. our career paths and vocational choices,
4. our reputations,
5. and our integrity.

What are you worth? The answer includes:

1. Who we are,
2. how we think of ourselves and who we are becoming,
3. our significance,
4. our quality of life,
5. our health
6. and maybe even our life span.

How much are you worth? If we reduced you to the basic chemicals that make up the human body, you are worth less than \$5. If we tanned your hide we might get another \$5. If we divided you up into organs and body parts, you are worth about \$45 million on the black market. But that's the not the way I'm asking the question right now.

What are you worth? The answer will influence the way we respond when someone comes along and expects something of us, when they put pressure on us to do a certain thing or behave a certain way. For example; you're tired and you just want to stay home and have some peace and quiet but the phone rings and a friend asks you to do something that you really don't want to do. You don't want to do whatever it is, but you end up doing it, even though you don't really want to. But you do it, because you will feel bad if you refuse, you will feel guilty if they feel bad. What is this dynamic that keeps us trying to please others in an unhealthy way?

What am I worth? If I allow others to decide what I do when, what I believe and how I behave-- what am I saying about what I'm worth? Can I be bought that cheaply?

But, if I make decisions that are in my best interest—decisions that help me along as I grow and move toward God--that is a good thing. But if I begin to waffle on those decisions or feel bad or guilty about them because I am not behaving the way my family or close friends expect me to behave, what am I saying about what I am worth?

When it happens, and it does sometimes, that I begin to doubt my self-worth, then I don't hold firmly to my commitment to make good decisions. I find myself willing to sell my convictions for acceptance and approve from others.

When I doubt my self-worth I waffle on my decisions because someone else won't like it, or will be inconvenienced and I end up feeling trapped and guilty or irritated and angry because of the frustration it causes – it is at these moments when I resonate with Paul: “. . . I don't understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want, instead, I do what I (don't want) *sic*” (Ro 7.15). When that happens, it is usually because I have doubts about what I'm worth.

If we have a strong concept of our worth, then our every choice will move us closer to God and the freedom we have in his grace.

If we do not have a healthy sense of our worth then we will more than likely find ourselves in situations which cause us to stress out, which make us sick and prevent us from becoming the gift to others we were made to be.

What are you worth?

Our gospel reading this morning addresses the question of values and the worth of a person.

Jesus had accepted an invitation to a dinner party in the home of a man named Simon, a member of the devoutly religious Pharisees. In Simon's neighborhood there lived a woman whose life was a tangled mess of degrading behavior and shame, we don't know what she did, but people like Simon looked down on her.

Here we have a devoutly religious Pharisee who lived a good life. He took his commitment to God seriously and worked hard at living up to it. Now before we go judging him for judging the woman, let's give him some credit for his good life and example to those whom he led, for he was surely an influential person in his community and perhaps even in the synagogue.

There were not too many Pharisees that had Jesus home for tea in broad daylight. I like to think this man Simon was genuinely seeking with an open mind and was even willing to risk criticism from his colleagues and

peers by having Jesus in his house. Jesus was, after all, gaining a reputation for keeping disreputable company.

However, Simon didn't count on one of those disreputable people turning up in his house. To him this questionable woman was barely even worthy of the title "human" and according to his religious sensibilities she was way beyond the pale and wouldn't have rated even a passing concern from God. She had not exhibited any religious uprightness or proper behavior and on this basis alone should be excluded and banished from the presence of God even though she was born a Jewess. God was far too holy to be involved with such trash.

Simon's flesh would have been crawling in the presence of this woman, how could Jesus let her touch him? Instead Jesus looks at the woman kindly and says to Simon, "Do you see this woman".

The point is Simon didn't see her as a person with dignity or worth and the challenge from Jesus had implications that would impact just about everything Simon thought and understood about God. This was not just offending his sensibilities, Jesus was challenging the firmly established order of the way things are and the 'accepted' rules of who was in and who was out of God's Kingdom.

Then Jesus goes even further and forgives her sins. I can hear Simon yelling silently to himself, "What right did he have to do this!" Everyone knew that sins could only be forgiven in the temple with the right rituals and protocols given by God himself.

But Jesus freed the woman from a life of guilt, and welcomed her into the Kingdom, while Simon was left reeling from the accusation that she should be an example to him.

He did not understand what was going on—it often happens that those who live by the law think they have no need for forgiveness--because they are 'good' and their self-righteousness prevents them from loving like God loves.

This woman was freed beyond her wildest dreams and her love and devotion were poured out in a powerful response of gratitude. She didn't care what anyone else thought, her guilt was gone and she was free to love God and live for him. She had been given her life back. And she didn't care what others expected of her or thought of her. In that moment, she knew what she was worth.

In my work with Christian people as a spiritual director and a pastor and in my own experience as I have struggled along on my pilgrimage, I have found that one of the biggest stumbling blocks that continually plagues us and trips us up is the grinding inner voice that quietly and persistently says over and over "I am not good enough, I'm too sinful, I don't deserve God's love, I'm not capable, I'm stupid, I've tried and failed too many times, I don't want to get above my place." We feel guilty, and unworthy to receive his grace into the deepest places of our lives.

All that accomplishes is keeping us miserable in ourselves, difficult for others to live with and worn out from trying to please other people by the way we live. We get a glimpse of just how good it would be to be really free, but...butwe just quite get there.

What would people think if I was so free that I could move towards God and make decisions that would free me from the tyranny of pleasing others? I wouldn't have to feel guilty about saying 'no' to your expectations or pressure to behave in certain ways even when you seem to be reasonable and make sense.

My friends--when someone tries to manipulate you because of their weakness, their need to 'own' or 'control' you can say 'no' and let them take responsibility for themselves. It is not your job or your responsibility to make anyone else feel good.

This sort of freedom is heady stuff. But the longer you practice and experience it, the more like Jesus you will become. His Spirit will fill you with joy and your life will overflow with gratitude and grace. Paul's message to the Galatians is that when we live God's way, he brings gifts into our lives like

affection for others,
exuberance about life,
and serenity.

We develop a willingness to stick with things,
a sense of compassion in the heart,
and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and
people.

We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments,
not needing to force our way in life,
but able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

So, what are you worth?

Remember the understanding we hung right here? Let's get it down
now –

What are you worth? – you are worth what God was willing to pay for
you – the price he paid was Christ on the cross. That is how much you are
worth.

And don't go thinking that there are so many people that it decreases your
worth – have you ever met another one of you? – I don't just mean in terms
of talent, or appearance – I mean the whole package? You should know
you are one of a kind, you are rare, where you are is the only place God or
anybody else can find one like you. That only increases your value.

And how much value does God place on you? He sent his Son to die so
you could be his.

Your worth has been determined by God – don't let anybody else sell you
short – and don't sell yourself short, either. You are custom-made to God's
specifications and he gave his life for you – that is what you are worth.

But this isn't just all about you either. How dare we place a value on
someone else that is less than God has placed on them?

Think about that, the next time you feel inclined to look down on someone, or to pass judgment on them, like Simon did.

Amen?