

## WORTH - Lawrence Peak

Sunday August 5<sup>th</sup> 2018 Pentecost 11

One of my many failings is that I like to collect watches, wrist watches, and I enjoy my collection of about 6 watches for all purposes and occasions. Ladies and the even some men these days have a lot of jewellery; I don't have any jewellery at all but I do have these watches – including my \$30 Rolex which I bought in a Vietnamese market in Ho Chi Minh City. I also have a watch I bought on the Rocky Mountaineer in Canada with the second hand in the shape of a miniature train which goes round and round; and when you press the winder it makes a little train whistle! That's my weakness amongst many others, I like watches!

I also have a gardening watch which I use when I get down and dirty and the other day its battery went flat; so when I was next in Hornsby at the watch centre just outside K Mart in Westfield I asked for the price to install a new battery - \$20.

I then went into K-Mart to their accessories section and found the self same watch with battery and watch band - \$9 !! Of course made in China.

So I bought it and I hate to say it but I threw the old one out, even though there was nothing wrong with it.

Planned obsolescence! For so much these days you don't bother to get it fixed, just throw it out and buy a new one which is cheaper than the repair.

Which brings me to the subject of our thoughts this morning – Worth.

If you were in a hurry and you spotted a 5 cent piece on the ground, would you stop to stoop down and pick it up? Maybe not! Whereas if it were a \$10 note almost certainly you would!

Essentially we are comparing our time and energy against the value of the money on the ground. We are declaring the value of something by the time and effort we are willing to expend to reclaim it.

You will remember the very well-known parables in Luke, the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and what follows directly is the parable of the lost or prodigal son.

All three seem to suggest that God is not like that at all. Every part of his creation is valuable to him no matter how mean and lowly.

The shepherd is looking for that one lost sheep. Why bother when 99 are safe and sound. 99% that's a pretty good success rate – but not so with God.

The woman expends a huge effort to find that lost coin – no doubt of very little value. Yet to the woman it is so important and she is willing to go to great effort, to turn the place upside down until it is found.

The prodigal son reached the very depths of filth and loneliness after rejecting his Father and heading off on his own. When he comes to his senses and comes back to his Father with an abject apology. The Father could have said to his son “You have made your bed, now go lie in it” however, on the contrary, the Father is overjoyed for here again is someone who has been lost.

The message is very clear – no matter how insignificant or hopeless we might think we are, God loves us in an individual way as if we were the only person in the entire world to love. He has the time and the power and the scope of vision and care to do this.

One might wonder how can God manage to individually love everyone on the planet? We cannot do it. Sometimes our resources are stretched so thinly that we think there is no more of us to give or care. We feel totally drained and inadequate when faced with all the needs around the world. Sometimes we suffer from that syndrome “compassion fatigue” and understandably so. So often we feel like those old-fashioned telephone operators frantically trying to plug in the cables and make the connections and answer every call. There are lights flashing everywhere – calling us, needing us, and we struggle with all the calls on our time and energy. But God is not like that, his resources are infinite and his care is infinite and individually focussed on each and every one of us.

Harry Emerson Fosdick was a very famous and articulate Christian who lived from 1878 until 1969. He was a very thoughtful author who wrote 47 books including “The Meaning of Faith” and “The Meaning of Prayer”. He served as a

chaplain in the horrors of France in 1917 and was an internationally recognised theologian who preached at the famous Riverside Church in New York. He was an outspoken critic against racism and injustice and raised a few hackles in doing so.

In the “Meaning of Prayer” he has this to say about God’s individual care.

*Knowledge, when it moves out towards omniscience, always breaks up vague masses into individual units and cares for each of them. When an ignoramus goes into a library he can see only long rows of books, almost indistinguishable as units. But when the librarian comes, the student and lover books, he knows each one by name. Each volume has its special associations; he knows the edition, the value, the contents, the author, the purpose. He takes down one book after another revealing individual appreciation for each. The more he knows as a librarian, the less he sees books in the mass; the more he knows them one by one. Thus increasing knowledge is always not only extensive but also intensive. Ignorance sees things in mass; knowledge breaks all masses into units and knows each one; omniscience perfectly understands and cares for every most minute detail.*

*We stand every one separate in his thought. He lifts us up from the obscurity of our littleness, he picks us up from the multitude of our fellows. He gives to our lives the dignity of his individual care. The Eternal God calls us every one by name.*

Jesus reflected God’s attitude so clearly when he took time with women (who had no voice at all in those days), sinners, tax gatherers, prostitutes, Samaritans, lepers and other outcasts and the mentally disturbed. All were important to him, all counted.

So when we pray that every day in every way we want to become more like our Lord – here’s one important aspect to take on board and emulate as much as we can.

Of course, we don’t do it properly – we get tired and cranky and dismissive. Our priorities sometimes don’t allow us to reach out and care for everyone we might meet individually.

But maybe with God's help we can re-examine our priorities to make room for others as much as we can.

I said earlier that the worth we ascribe to something is measured by the time, energy and risk we are willing to undergo to reclaim it. I am reminded of that little verse in the Gospel of John which says

*“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

We read this verse this morning and perhaps it is the most famous verse in all the Bible.

Even though I am sure I don't fully understand the full import of these words, what it is saying to me is that the world is precious to God – it is his creation and in spite of the very obvious fact that it is marred in so many ways, he loves the beauty and the majesty of his creation including the snow-capped mountains and the mighty rivers and the staggering sunrises and sunsets and the amazing diversity and delicate design of all its wildlife and us - frail human beings with all our faults and failings. And he loves us to the extent that his only son, his only begotten son of the same essence as God himself became human with all its pain and vulnerability and anguish and risk. But the risk was worth it, even a stark and agonising cross at Calvary was worth it to show the extent to which that love was prepared to go.

It is this same love that we now remember and celebrate. In this sacrament now we remember and re-enact the words of Jesus. “This is my body given for you, this is my blood which is poured out for you”.

God loves us far more than we could ever know. God loves us far more than anything we might hold dear and might love in our lives. God loves me far more than everything I hold dear – even my collection of watches!

Amen