

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 17, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Philippians 3:8-14

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Years ago there was a very wealthy man who, with his devoted young son, shared a passion for art collecting. Together they traveled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection. Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet and many others adorned the walls of the family estate. The widowed man watched with joy as his only child became an experienced art collector. The son's trained eye and sharp business mind caused his father to beam with pride as they dealt with art collectors around the world.

But as winter approached, war engulfed the nation, and the young man left to serve his country. After only a few short weeks, his father received a telegram. His beloved son was missing in action. The art collector anxiously awaited more news, fearing he would never see his son again. Within days, his fears were confirmed; the young man had died while rushing a fellow soldier to a medic. Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas holidays with anguish and sadness in his heart. The masterpieces of art on the walls only reminded him that his son was not coming home. On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man, and as he opened the door, he was greeted by a soldier with a large package in his hands. He introduced himself to the man by saying, "I was a friend of your son's. I was the one he was rescuing when he died. May I come in for a few moments? I have something to show you." As the two began to talk, the soldier told of how the man's son had spoke of his, not to mention his father's, love of fine art.

"I am an artist," said the soldier, "and I want to give you this." As the old man unwrapped the package, the paper gave way to reveal a portrait of the man's son. Though the world would never consider it the work of a genius, the painting featured the young man's face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the man thanked the soldier, promising to hang the picture in the center of his prized collection. True to his word, that day he placed the painting above the fireplace, pushing aside expensive works of art. The old man sat in his chair and spent Christmas gazing at the gift he had been given.

During the days and weeks that followed, the man learned about how his son had rescued dozens of wounded soldiers before a bullet stilled his caring heart. As the stories of his son's heroism continued to reach him, fatherly pride and satisfaction filled his heart again. The painting of his son soon became his most prized possession. He told his neighbors it was the greatest gift he had ever received.

The few springs later, the old man became very ill and passed away. The art world was in anticipation, that with the collector's passing, and his only son dead, those paintings would be sold at auction. According to the will of the old man, all of the art works would be auctioned on Christmas Day, the day he had received the greatest gift. That day art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. Dreams would be fulfilled this day; greatness would be achieved as many would claim, *"I have the greatest collection."* The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list. It was the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid, but the room was silent. *"Who will open the bidding with \$100?"* he asked. Minutes passed, and no one spoke. From the back of the room came a voice, *"Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son."* *"Let's forget about it and move on to the good stuff,"* more voices echoed in agreement. *"No, we have to sell this one first,"* replied the auctioneer. *"Now, who will take the son?"* Finally, a neighbor of the old man spoke. *"Will you take ten dollars for the painting? That's all I have. I knew the boy, so I'd like to have it."* *"I have ten dollars. Will anyone go higher?"* called the auctioneer. After more silence, the auctioneer said, *"Going once, going twice, gone."* The gavel fell. Cheers filled the room and someone exclaimed, *"Now we can get on with it and bid on the real treasures!"* The auctioneer looked at the audience and announced that the auction was over.

Stunned disbelief quieted the room. People protested, *"What do you mean, it's over? We didn't come here for a picture of some guy's son. What about all of these paintings? There is millions of dollars worth of art here! We demand that you explain what is going on!"* The auctioneer replied, *"It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son ... gets it all."* Yes, whoever gets the son gets it all!

I share this lengthy story with you today because this is the same truth the apostle Paul came by grace to realize. ***"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him."*** The will of our Father in heaven is also that whoever has the Son has it all. By grace we have learned the same thing. My prayer is that we rejoice in and hold onto what the Lord has blessed us with through faith in Jesus for: **Christ is our true Treasure!**

All the things that Paul once thought were most important he now calls a loss. All the things he held most dear, the things he thought mattered the most, the things that were his top priority he now calls garbage – a bunch of rubbish. What were some of those things Paul once thought mattered most? He lists some. He thought what was most important was who he was and what he did. He had the title of being a Pharisee. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and of the people Israel. As far as what Paul did – no one was more zealous for keeping the law than him. But now Paul says all this is trash, because he now had real treasure. Everything else is rubbish, that is compared to having Christ, and what Paul had in Christ: ***"not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God***

and is by faith.” All those things Paul listed before were not bad in and of themselves, but without the Son, without Jesus, none of those things mattered.

But with Jesus, Paul had a brand new perspective. He had true righteousness. He had full forgiveness. He was in a right relationship with God. He had eternal life. He had all these things through faith. So now fame, and titles, and power, and glory, and money – none of those things mattered as much as being found in Christ. He even was ready and willing to share in Christ’s sufferings. He wasn’t even afraid to die because he knew the power of Christ’s resurrection and that he too will live. That is why Paul is filled with joy and is able to rejoice even as he writes this letter from prison. This is why, even though from an earthly viewpoint in might has look like Paul has less than he ever did, he now had everything because he had Christ Jesus.

Do we recognize the same thing? Christ is our true treasure! I repeat – Christ is our true treasure! Yet, our sinful flesh likes to take us in all different directions doesn’t it? It likes to tell us we matter to God because of who we are or what we have done. The devil likes to keep our eyes on things like power, pleasure, and possessions. The world wants us to think that what matters the most is money & titles, fame & fortune. We can have all of these things, but without the Son, without Jesus in the end we get nothing. But whoever has the Son has life the Scriptures say – in fact we have eternal life. For in Jesus we too, like Paul, have ***“the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”*** So I pray we too consider everything else we may have at one time thought to be most important rubbish, trash, a bunch of garbage, compared to Christ our real treasure.

One day we will see this most clearly. When we die or when Jesus comes again to be found in Christ is the only thing that will matter. Paul realized for him this time had not come yet. ***“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*** This is also my encouragement this morning for all of you. As Paul writes in another place ***“in a race all runners run, but only one gets a prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize?” (1 Corinthians 9)*** There is nothing more important for you or your children than faith in Jesus. So live that way. Make God’s Word your top priority! Grow in grace and knowledge. Don’t just sing about Jesus as your priceless treasure – treat Christ as such.

In one week from today we will start the most important week of the year – the week we call holy. During that week you will hear another story about a Father and His beloved Son – a true story. You will watch as this Son did so much more than rescue dozens of soldiers. He came to give up His life to save a world of sinners. Jesus, by His suffering and death on the cross, accomplished just that – if you want proof make sure you come back two weeks from now to peer into His tomb. Now we too know how the story ends – whoever has the Son gets it all – forgiveness, life, peace, joy, and heaven. Is there any question at all about what matters the most? Christ is our true treasure! Amen.