

15th Sunday after Trinity: September 12, 2021

“What’s It Worth?”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. St. Paul writes, *“²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. ¹Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ²Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”¹*

The terms capitalist and socialist have been thrown around as political weapons, and I know they are very loaded terms that carry much baggage. Today, I don’t want to sift through all of the baggage. I want you to hear the words of God, without the baggage of the terms attached. The idea of capitalism helps us to frame the texts for today. Because this is the system in which we were born and raised, it is the default way many of us think. With prices fluctuating and concern over the past years of price gouging, can a capitalist really complain? In the theory of capitalism, a things value is based upon what people are willing to pay. After a hurricane, water is worth a fortune. Because people are willing to pay more for it, in the clinical definition of capitalism, one cannot complain about price gouging; it is simply capitalizing on an opportunity.

Why does this not sit right with some? Because ethics steps in; it is not just simply a theory, but a practice. How does one live in love towards their neighbors? Twenty years ago, the stark reality of the life of the flesh and the life of the Spirit was forefront on many minds, as the country reeled from the attacks of September 11. When wounds were fresh, anger and sadness seemed to the ruling emotion of the day. For twenty years, and really more than that, the constant question nags, “What’s it worth?”

¹ Galatians 5:25-6:10

Last week, we heard from St. Paul a long list of what the sinful flesh desires and what it looks like to live in the Spirit. The text today is a continuation from last week. To walk by the Spirit requires bearing one another's burdens. To be in the Spirit is to restore one another, not from a position of power or arrogance, but with a goal of the sinner repenting—restored in the family of God.

This is the law of Christ, *"You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."*²

How much is one willing to pay for the most precious things in life? Truth of the matter is the value of the most precious things in life cannot be measured by human wants or willingness to pay. The value of human life isn't determined by what people want or how much they want to live. The value of human life is determined by God. When you consider that God not only made us in His image, but also became flesh and redeemed us with His blood, that is why we are more valuable than birds.

Jesus directs us to consider the birds. Mankind, made in God's very image, is directed to look at the birds. He doesn't say the animals are not important, but He also doesn't say the animals are more important. So, what about the birds? Our fall into sin corrupted all of God's perfect creation. God's love and care was not to leave creation in that corruption; instead, His desire was to restore it. So, what did He do? He didn't become a bird. He didn't become a flower. He didn't become a fish, or a puppy, or an oak tree. He became a Man. He became one of us, born under the Law. What does this mean? That is your value. You are worth the life of the Son of God. You are worth the humility of the Son of God. You are worth the crucified flesh of Jesus. You are worth the spilled blood of the Son of God. He gives you your great worth. He gave His life to restore the image that you corrupted by your sin.

² John 13:13-17

Brothers and sisters in Christ, capitalism can teach us something. What we want and value has a theological significance. It may not be the fair market value, but we can use it's principles to help determine who or what is our god. As a review, we confess in the Large Catechism, " *'You shall have no other gods.'*¹ *That is, you shall regard me alone as your God. What does this mean, and how is it to be understood? What is to have a god? What is God?* ² *Answer: A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol.* ³ *If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.'*³

When you make mammon your god, when money is that which you look for all good or refuge in every time of need; when wealth is what you serve, or constantly worry and daydream about it; not only do you have a false god and worship an idol; but you actually cheapen your own life. You confess that your value as a human being can be measured by money. This is an American religion. Our currency says, "In God we trust." What God? I fear it is mainly the dollar itself and that is the real reason why we are fine with price gouging and economic disparity.

This is also why children are often seen as financial burdens rather than blessings from God. People plan babies for when they think they can afford them. They wait until they get to a point where they won't have give up much of their own stuff. They aren't sacrificing for their children or raising up good citizens, they are just getting pets to amuse themselves. In the same way, babies are killed in the womb because they cost too much or will negatively impact someone's lifestyle.

Money becomes the measure of the good life, the successful life, the life worth living. This destroys men's souls. Jesus harshly warns us against it. The worship of money causes money to be more precious than things that cannot be bought or sold: integrity, a clean conscience, faithfulness, piety, and love.

³ First Commandment, Luther's Large Catechism

You cannot buy or sell these things but you can give them away and lose them forever. They are far more valuable than money, but when you serve money as your god, when money occupies your thoughts day and night and you are constantly planning for what you would do with your money if you struck it rich, you are saying that money is what makes life worthwhile and money is what you need, the one thing that could help you. That is what worship is. You don't have to pray to a dollar bill to make it your god. You just have to ascribe worth to it for it to be your god and then imagine that it has the power to give you what you want and need.

Jesus says we cannot serve two masters. We agree. We say that we worship the only real God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. None of us says, "I worship money." But we need to look closely. What do we worry about? What do we fantasize? Do we not think, wrongly, that money could solve all of our problems? When we do, we are in need of being restored. We are wrong. Our faith is under attack and in danger. If we are truly devoted to God, we will let Him do the worrying for us. We are worth more than birds and He takes care of them.

Money itself, of course, is neutral. It is the love of money that is the root of every kind of evil. The devil is the master of using good and neutral things to get us to turn inward and away from God. The devil finds us easy prey for all sorts of materialism and the love of money. This false idol can be found on both sides of the political aisle. The devil has no loyalty to his subjects. He'll teach free market capitalism one day and socialism the next without batting an eye. He'll mix religion in politics and politics in religion to suit his goal.

Not only is the devil a good liar, he also knows your weaknesses better than you do. He wants you to think like an economic animal, and he is just as happy if that is an Adam Smith animal or a Karl Marx animal – so long as you are caught up in this world and not in God's promises. The devil wants you to believe that the food you eat and the clothes you wear and the house in which you live are not really provided by your loving Father in heaven, but are the result of your labors or the government or society, that you earned them or deserve them, that you don't need God.

Jesus says: You cannot serve two masters. You will either hate the one and love the other or be loyal to the one and despise the other. Jesus walked in the Spirit. He bears our burdens and shows us exactly what it looks like to bear one another's burdens in love. Jesus calls us to faith. The Lord takes care of the birds. More than that, He makes a promise to be your God. He has come to save you – not birds or flowers or fallen angels; so He says, ***“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”***⁴

Not one in here would rightly deny the value of the kingdom of God, or His righteousness, so where is it? Other myths place the kingdom of their gods in many different places. They look for it within themselves. They seek to climb high mountains, or plumb the depths of earth and sky. The One True God tells us exactly where it is. It's Jesus. Where Jesus is there is the kingdom of God.

How does one enter this kingdom? What must you do to inherit this kingdom? Have faith. You don't have to take your life and those of your enemies. You don't have to be nice enough to your neighbors. You don't have to give a certain amount of money, or put in a specified amount of time. Your worth is not determined by your work, your station in life, your hair color, skin color, or vehicle; your worth is given to you by God Himself. God's only begotten Son died, and give you His inheritance.

In wondrous fashion, God give you great worth. It is for fallen sinners that God joins His eternal Word to simple water and gives them His own righteousness. With His righteousness comes eternal life. To His regenerated Children, He creates and strengthens faith, through words spoken in absolution, from the lectern, and from the pulpit. In a beautiful moment, the ugliness of death is proclaimed defeated in glorious fashion, as Jesus joins His Word to bread and wine, and you eat the fruits of His death. Feasting on the crucified and risen body and blood of Jesus, your worth is undeniable.

⁴ Matthew 6:33

This is your worth. This changes things, changes you. This causes you not to seek your own righteousness, this is God's righteousness. This belongs to Him. It is His by right, and He gives this to you as a gift to be received by faith. Here it becomes easy to bear one another's burdens, and to correct and restore one another. God has died for you and for them. While you may be frail, and your neighbor may be flighty, you are all worth more than birds and you are all more beautiful than flowers. You are the image of Christ, whom Isaiah calls the Man of Sorrows. You were washed into His righteousness, declared to be righteous in Him. What was lost, you, is found, and what was dead, your heart, is alive. You are the beloved son of God in whom He is well-pleased. His righteousness has been given to you. In and by this proclamation, God captures your hearts and opens them for the Holy Spirit so that you become His Temples in His Kingdom and even do good works.

Often, it seems to me, the Holy Spirit shows us our true wealth by painfully taking away the illusions of money and health; that is to say, He makes us suffer so that we know what is important. Who cares who won the Superbowl or what grade you got on the final or if the lawn needs mowed or not when your child is on the operating table. We have what can't be bought or earned, but if life is too easy we forget it and we become easy prey for the devil. We have the forgiveness of sins. We expect and await the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting which is already begun in us. Sometimes we need to face death, face sorrow and hardship, to realize it and to see that money can't buy life. To know this, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, to be His child by Baptism, to eat His living Body and drink His Blood, this is richness and goodness beyond money and time.

Those who worship mammon perish with their god. Not us. Not you. You worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are Baptized. You are a catechumen of Jesus. You hear His Word and believe. Your future is secured in the hands of Him who died for you and rose again. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity: 12 September 2021

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. O God, You have set Your reign and Your righteousness before us in the person of Your Son, Jesus Christ; through Him you have shown to us and bestowed upon us great worth. Help us always look to Him who has saved us from our sins constantly seeking Him above all things. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, You have poured out Your Spirit on Your Church, that the Gospel of Your kingdom would be believed throughout the world. Bless the proclamation of Your Word by the pastors and missionaries You have sent, that many would hear and believe. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God, our heavenly Father, You have clothed creation in glorious dress and provide even more for all our needs of body and soul. Forgive us for our anxiety and worry. Help us always look to You for every good thing, trusting that, as our loving heavenly Father, You will never leave us without the things we need. You know the shock and sorrow that have spread across our land following September 11. Mercifully embrace the frightened in Your love empower the weak with Your strength, restrain the wicked by Your might, and preserve the righteous in Your grace. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Blessed Lord, You have prepared an abundance of good works in advance for us to do in Christ's name. Help us our daily lives to work hard; pay an honest wage; and be a blessing to our employers, employees and customers. Protect us from seeking wealth for our own sakes; rather, teach us rightly to use all Your gifts for the benefit of our neighbors, thereby bearing one another's burdens in love. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, guard and keep Joseph, our president; Kim, our governor; and all leaders in our land, that they would rule according to Your will and righteous decrees. Guard and keep those who serve in our armed forces, and send them faithful chaplains to comfort them with the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. Bring our nation to repentance for everything it celebrates contrary to Your will, especially the down-grading of your word, the scourge of abortion, the destruction of marriage, the false worship of mammon, the destruction of reputations, and the devastation of contentment. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of truth, You reveal Your will and ways in Holy Scripture. Bless all Your children, that they may grow in knowledge and understanding. Bless especially the children in our Sunday school and catechism classes, that they may rejoice in Your truth and receive Your Word with joy and faithfulness. Grant that all teachers may faithfully lead Your lambs to their Savior. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Richard, Cody, & Sophia*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided for all who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially *Dianna*. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, according to Your will give power to the faint and increase the strength of the sick and afflicted, the lonely, downtrodden, and all in need especially *Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Donna, Floyd, Tricia, David Teggatz and those we name in our hearts*. If it be Your will, grant them health and healing, and give them grace to receive the tribulations with courage and hope. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**