

John 12.12-19

The next day, when the great crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they took palm branches and went out to meet him. They cried out: "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the Lord's name, Israel's own king." Jesus found a little donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Daughter of Zion, don't be afraid. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt." At first his disciples did not understand these things, but when Jesus was glorified then they remembered that these things had been written about him and done to him. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify concerning what he had done. This was why the crowd had gone out to meet him, because they had heard that he had done this great sign. At that point, the Pharisees said to each other: "You see: you can do nothing. Look, the entire world has begun to follow him."

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I discovered something very disturbing the other day. This doesn't happen to me very often. I live a quiet life. I mind my own business, for the most part.

The other day, I discovered how much I was worth.

How much do you think it was?

\$4.50

Can you imagine? It turns out that I'm only worth a cup of coffee at Starbucks, barely!

Well, better said: that's what my body's worth, apparently. If you take all the elements in my body and boil them down to their elements, which gives me \$1.00's worth and then add the skin of the body, which is apparently the most valuable. That's worth \$3.50.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, this value also depends on stock market fluctuations: how much is magnesium worth today, for example? Maybe I'm only worth \$4.39 today!

Of course, you can also play with this figure: if you sell body parts, you can also ramp up the amount you're worth by quite a bit, but I don't recommend that approach.

Most people out there, who don't believe we are more than the elements that make up our bodies and the electrical pathways in our brains and nerves were probably hoping for more, but that's it. They really shouldn't have hoped for any more.

But, here's what this information got me started thinking: **are some of us worth more than others? Are some worth less?**

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.coolquiz.com/trivia/explain/docs/worth.asp>

Obviously some of us are bigger than others and see we might be worth more: Someone might have more minerals in their body so they're worth \$4.75 instead of 4.50!

OK, you know that's not what I mean. I'm just being provocative here.

But, let me ask the question again: do you think some people are worth more than others? are some worth less?

What about the people sitting next to you? Go ahead, take a look: what are they worth?

The famous -- some would say, "infamous" -- Princeton philosopher, Peter Singer, says that only fully competent adults are worth anything: infants, the mentally challenged whose mental skills will never be more than a child's, seniors... all these are worth less even than some animals, he says.<sup>2</sup>

OK, that's extreme, you might say. But what about you? Are you worth as much as, say, one of the Sens hockey players? Are you worth as much as, say, a famous entertainer, say, Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie?

It used to be that our society was clearly organized to show that the monarch was worth more than anyone else. Do you think the Queen is worth more than anyone else? Or, if you still have Dutch citizenship AND Canadian citizenship, do you think that Beatrix, Queen of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Elizabeth, Queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth are worth the same? How would we know? Does the question even make sense?

Well, we know that it used to make sense, since so many European wars were fought over the issue of which monarch was stronger, or more virtuous, or richer, or just simply better. The sorry history of W.W. I was just one horrific example of that.

In fact, the battlefields of history are littered with the bones of soldiers who died shouting "we are better than you", "we deserve your land", "we should rule you".

Which brings us to our Gospel for today.

For hundreds of years, the people of Israel, who knew that they were God's chosen people, had been waiting for pay-back time on the field of battle.

Why?

For centuries they had suffered under other nations that ruled them. But they knew that they were God's people and that one day God would act in that final battle. Sometimes they thought it would be fought in the Valley of Megiddo -- Armageddon, sometimes they thought it would be fought right in Jerusalem.

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<sup>2</sup>Gilbert Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), 6.

They were always defeated. They had been made slaves in Babylon, and then lived century after century under Persian occupation, Greek occupation, and finally now Roman occupation, troops stationed throughout the land and taxes required of all inhabitants of the land. Even the Temple itself had been violated by the great Roman general Pompey, who knew that he, and all Rome with him, were worth more than all the Jews put together. Look at Rome! Look at Israel! Hah.

Even some among the people of Israel became convinced, too, that they were nothing. When the people were delivered into slavery and bondage of exile, they looked around them and said: "Ah, this is why we are not doing better: we don't have cities, and wealth, and treasures, like these great cultures." So they said: "We will never be great until we have taken away from the pagans all the treasures that they have and they have been made ours." That's the pay-back that they were looking for: not just peace in their own little corner of the world, but having everything. After all, they were God's people.

Have you heard of the word "glory"? Do you know what Hebrew word that English word "glory" translates? The Hebrew word for "glory" is *kabod*, which means 'heavy'. The heavier something is, the more *kabod* it has, the more "glory". That's a sign of worth: you put that on the scale and that out-weighs anything else. The wealth of the nations, their gold, their treasures, their great buildings, their great temples, their great armies. These are really, really heavy, "glorious" to a degree that can barely be imagined. Worth more than anything else.

So, the poor Israelites dreamed, dreamed that one day God would act to reverse their fate and bring to them all the weight of the world's glory: all its gold and its treasures. One day, they said, we shall be worth more than all the nations of the earth, when the Lord acts. Our Temple, which is now beautiful, built with heavy stones and finished with heavy jewels will one day be even more splendid.

So, they watched for that day when God would act. They knew it would be around Passover, the great feast of God's deliverance from the greatest power in the universe, the might and glory of Egypt. They watched Passover after Passover, feast after Feast, until one Passover, they saw him coming.

Like a small cloud on the horizon, Jesus had gone from a nobody to having a great following. His teaching and his miracles had gathered crowds that became greater and greater as he performed one miracle after another: the wine in Cana, various healings, the multiplication of loaves of bread in the desert even as Moses had done after that first Passover, the giving of sight to a man born blind from birth, and finally the raising from the dead of a man named Lazarus. Like Moses, Jesus had no trained army but these signs convinced them that Jesus was gathering the people, even as the greatest military leader Israel had ever known, Moses, had done in Egypt. And they said: if God acted through Moses to give us a land, then what will God do through this one, who is even greater than Moses? He will give us what we deserve, everything, for we are worth it!

Like a small cloud on the horizon, growing larger with every step, Jesus, and the growing crowd of followers now approached Jerusalem. It is the feast of Passover. Something big, something

heavy, something “glorious” is going to happen. Everyone knows it. You can feel it in the air. This is it!

They can feel it. So, as Jesus made his way up the steep road to Jerusalem, the great fortress city, prepared to enter it, and, as everyone now began to suspect, to seize it and begin cleansing the earth of all impiety, they begin to sing the great Psalm of victory, Psalm 118:

Save us, -- *hoshianah* in Hebrew

Save us, Lord, and give us victory -- over whom? if not over our enemies as vs 15 makes clear “There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous”

Blessed is the one who comes in the name -- and power -- of the Lord,

The one who -- finally -- comes to reign as Israel’s king.

They sang it over and over again. They threw down their garments, as some Gospels say, and cut off palm fronds, as John says, making that culture’s “red carpet” to welcome God’s own anointed king to the city of the king, a king would bring all the **heavy** treasures of the world to Jerusalem as he conquered one army after another. More riches than David, more than Solomon. He would bring them everything.

The Pharisees know that this is what is happening and just shake their heads: It’s too late to stop him now. The people know he’s the king.

Little did they know how right they were ... and how wrong they were.

Because they were wrong, weren’t they? They all thought that Jesus was coming to destroy the Romans, and begin God’s destruction of all the worthless in the world, leaving only Israel.

Frankly, friends, I don’t think that you or I would have done any differently. After all, they saw him choose a donkey’s colt to ride into the city, just as Zechariah had predicted the king would: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” And they knew the rest of Zechariah’s prophecy: “He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

The people knew that the Romans would not stand a chance when he began to call down the armies of heaven to defeat them.

But, what did Jesus do? Within less than a week, the people of Jerusalem realized that Jesus wasn’t interested in destroying the Romans and all the other Gentiles, like you and me, with them. Within less than a week, Jesus showed them that his real target was indeed restoring God’s glory, but not through military conquest, but through opening the eyes of people everywhere to a God who from the beginning had loved the world that He had made, even though that world had always rejected him in favour of other treasures and other means of getting those treasures.

Surely if anyone could have seen this it would have been those who were supposedly closest to God, those who had been entrusted with this truth, His own people and their leaders.

Yet, in less than week, the people who were supposed to be closest to God in God's own Temple were the ones who were planning to kill him... kill God's king!! It wasn't difficult for them, in less than a week, to turn the very people who had acclaimed him king against him and shout "We have no king, except for Caesar in Rome!" Not even God was there king any longer.

In less than a week later, Judas would show the world how much he, a close disciple of Jesus, and the religious leadership of Israel thought this so-called king Jesus was really worth: 30 pieces of silver. That was more than \$4.50, but not a lot more.

In the end, the Gospels will show us that Jesus was worth absolutely nothing, not 30 pieces of silver, not even \$4.50. Even the poor clothes that he had worn at his trial were taken from him and lots were cast for them as he was taken to a cross as a criminal and crucified there. Dead, he would not even have had a burial site, had it not been for a man named Joseph. The body of Jesus was worth less than nothing.

No king mourned for Jesus, not even his close friends. Peter, who had thought that he was worth a lot, had said: I'll never abandon you, and yet when Peter was tried in the refiner's fire of persecution his friendship was shown to be worthless.

No, Jesus had no one to mourn him, except for a few equally worthless women, for Jesus had become worth less than nothing.

Fortunately, Jesus' body had already been prepared for burial by someone who did see how much he was worth. Mary, Lazarus's sister, the one who had brought Jesus to the tomb where her brother lay dead, had already prepared his body for burial. How? Do you remember? John 12.1-11. Just before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as king, Jesus spends one last night in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. And there, with his other disciples, including Judas, Mary takes an alabaster jar filled with a perfume, and begins to anoint Jesus' feet with it.... all of it! It's one of the most expensive perfumes available, pure nard. It grows in the Himalayas and the Far East: China, Japan, India. In the Middle East it would have been very rare, very precious. How much was it worth? Judas, who is obviously interested in money, knew exactly how much it was worth: 300 denarii, a full year's salary. How much do you earn in one year? 30,000; 50,000; 75,000; 100,000. That's what this perfume was worth. That was a lot; it was all that Mary had. And Jesus was worth it.

Mary, like the few worthless women around Jesus, knew how much Jesus was worth.

Do you?

How much? How much are you willing to show it? Surely not like Peter, running away from the challenge issued to him: Are you one of Jesus' disciples?

Are you like Mary? Willing to give everything that you have to show how much he's worth?

I hope so, because you see the answer to the question of what you are worth is actually found in the answer to how much you think he's worth. Because a Christian knows that the right answer to the question "what are you worth?" is "you are worth the blood of the Son of God". Not because of who you are but because of what he has done on the cross. He gave himself a ransom for the whole world, for those who thought of themselves as worth a lot and for those who knew that they were worthless. He did not make us worthy by giving us gold and silver and other **heavy** and glorious treasures but by giving up his own worth, his own glory, even as Paul said, he "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross." For us. All for us.

What are you worth? What is the worth of the person sitting next to you? What is the worth of that baby in the womb, that million dollar hockey player, that senior in a wheelchair, that Queen on her throne... all of you are worth more than you could ever dare to ask or imagine. You are worth the death of God's own Son for you. And He is more glorious -- more "heavy" -- than all the weight of the universe, which Paul tells us, hangs together in Him!

The question before you is: now that you know that, what will you do? and how will you now live? Seeking yet more worth? Or living your days in thankfulness and joy, and making this known to all who still in darkness and the shadow of death?

I hope you will and that you will live out the rest of your earthly days even as you will live in eternity, giving glory -- real heaviness -- to the one to whom it belongs, to God, who alone is King.