

The Surpassing Value
A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday April 3, 2022

Philippians 3:4-14
John 12:1-8

When I read Paul's letter I am struck by the singlemindedness of Paul.

He says: whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

What does Paul want? – he wants to be found in Jesus, he wants to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection.

What does he trust in? – a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ.

What is he willing to give up? – everything

What else does he value? – nothing – he says;

"I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 3:9 and be found in him."

Paul had lots to be proud of according to his culture.

He was respected, he had prestige, he was a somebody – but he counted all of that as nothing, as rubbish compared with the surpassing value of knowing Jesus.

Knowing Jesus was the most important thing in Paul's life.

What do you take pride in?

What are the important things in your life?

Paul's message to us, is that compared to knowing Jesus, the Messiah, those things are not important.

What do you give your life to?

What do you look to, to give you joy and satisfaction?

What are the things you are working towards?

Paul's word of encouragement is that the best goal, what will satisfy you for all of life and for eternity, is knowing Jesus.

Knowing Jesus is better and of far greater value than being the club golf pro or the best bridge player in your club.

Are you working as hard on knowing Jesus as you are your golf or bridge game?

Knowing Jesus is better and of far greater value than getting that promotion at work.

Are you working as hard on knowing Jesus as you are in getting ahead at work?

Knowing Jesus is better and of far greater value than winning Canada has talent, or playing for the CFL, or any of those things we value and prize.

Are you working as hard on Knowing Jesus as you are on your developing your talents and skills.

Why work for what **does** not satisfy **you**? asks the prophet Isaiah. (Isaiah 55:2)

What will satisfy us, what will nurture us, and is of surpassing value is knowing Jesus.

And this "knowing" is not about watching him or admiring him, but being his follower.

Jesus never said; "come admire me".

But he invited people to “come follow me”, come be my disciple or apprentice.

There are those who know about Jesus, who admire him, who know the stories, and watch him from a comfortable pew, or read about him in the pages of a good book, or even the good book, the Bible, but the *knowing* that Paul is talking about is being Jesus’ follower, learning Jesus’ ways by following in his footsteps.

John Calvin wrote that “true doctrine (teaching) is not a matter of the tongue, but of life; neither is Christian doctrine (truth) grasped only by the intellect and memory, as truth is grasped in other field of study.

Rather, Christian truth is rightly received when it takes possession of the entire soul and finds a dwelling place and shelter in the most intimate affections of the heart.

The gospel’s power ought to penetrate the innermost affections of the heart, sink down into the soul, and inspire the whole person.”

The path of following Jesus will always lead to sacrifice, for that is Jesus’ way.

We cannot hold on to all the things of the world that we take pride in, that we want to go after, all of those must be held lightly, with a willingness to let any of them go, be second and third priorities, and some of them will have to be discarded because of Christ, because of the surpassing value of knowing him.

Anything that is held above our relationship with Jesus, our knowing him, our apprenticeship to him, is an idol that must be counted as rubbish.

Does that mean we won’t play golf, or bridge, or work hard at our jobs, or develop our talents and skills?

No. All those things are good but only as part of knowing Jesus.

We know Jesus as we enjoy this good life he has given us, as we provide for our families, as we work at something that has value, as we develop our talents and gifts and use them for the glory of God.

But we all know there is a difference between doing things in a way that honours God, and keeps Jesus first in our lives, and not.

Are the things we are doing bringing us closer to Jesus, or creating a wedge?

When Jesus is at the centre of our lives all the other parts find their proper place and relationship.

Following Jesus, in apprenticing our lives to him we find the surpassing value of knowing him, that is greater than anything else.

And maybe we will become like Mary who we find first sitting at the feet of Jesus as a disciple, then as a witness to her brother Lazarus being raised from the dead, and today we see her pouring out this love offering on Jesus. We see her humility, her single-minded devotion, and her great gift to her Lord.

I can't think of someone else who gave a gift to Jesus, a costly gift of her love, anointing him for burial without realizing it.

I think Mary could have written the words of Paul, or echoed them with her whole being:

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

Thanks be to God.