

## Worth

Lk 15:1-10, 1 Tim 1:12-17

Cradock Presbyterian Church

September 15, 2013

One of the songs of my generation had an unforgettable refrain, something that sort of summed up our experience in the early 70s. See if you can remember the song.

*Don't it always seem to go*

*That you don't know what you got 'til it's gone.*

*They paved Paradise and put up a parking lot.*

Yeah, I know, the song's been redone; but for those of us who remember the original, we remember that it was a protest song. It was protesting how society had forgotten the true worth of things. The original was written in 1970. Bonus points to you if you remember the exact title of the song and the original singer/songwriter. The thing that sticks out to me now, after all these years, is how at the very end of the song, the singer sings about how her "old man" got taken away, as if even *he* had no worth.

Taken away?! That sounds scary! Where did he go? Doesn't matter; the point is that the singer had lost something of great worth to her. That's what Luke is getting at in his two stories here in chapter 15.

The first one has a shepherd lose one of his hundred sheep. That's only one percent. If the shepherd was a good businessman, he wouldn't risk leaving unprotected the 99 still under his control while he went looking for the one. The story doesn't tell us he had any assistant shepherds, so you have to take it as it is written. The shepherd valued the lost sheep, felt it had so much worth, that he left the safe ones alone and

went after the lost one. He must have thought it had great worth – look at how he celebrates and invites others to celebrate when he returns home with the lost one.

Then there's the story about the woman with the lost coin. In the original language it's called a *drachma*, a Greek coin in use then. It was worth about 65¢ in today's money. So right away you know – what this woman has lost is not as valuable as the sheep that the shepherd lost in the first story. But what does she do? She goes to great measures – lighting a lamp, sweeping the whole house, looking diligently – until she finds it. Then she celebrates just as hard as the shepherd did, even though what she's found isn't "worth" as much.

But who decides the "worth?" We just made some assumptions that might not be valid, because we based them on monetary worth. What if the shepherd and the woman assigned worth to the sheep and the coin on a different basis? Shepherds are not much different from modern farmers or ranch hands. Out of a group of animals, they'll have favorites. Could it be that this lost sheep was especially loved by the shepherd? What about the woman and her coins? Those might have been from a collection given to her by someone she loved, so she thought they were of great worth. To lose even one would be bad. If the shepherd and the woman were asked to decide the worth of the sheep and the coin, they might say they were *priceless*.

That's the point Jesus makes here about our worth. Oh yes, he's talking about us; or have you forgotten that we are all sinners, that we all need to repent? Even more than the shepherd and the woman, there is rejoicing in heaven when we return from being "lost" – even if we were only lost for a little while. That's because to our Lord, we

are worth more than anything; we might even be “priceless,” beyond any measure of worth on earth.

I think that’s what Paul was telling Timothy, in the other passage we read. To be judged faithful and appointed by our Lord to his service is a powerful statement of our worth. But it’s NOT simply a statement about how much we’re worth; it’s a statement about the worth of the grace of our Lord Jesus in our lives. Paul lays it out: “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.” Then he goes on to say why he was so valued by Jesus: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason” – the reason of his being the biggest sinner – “I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.” You understand what that means, I hope. We are loved by our Lord Jesus, AND he uses the example of how much worth he places on us to encourage others to believe in him. That just makes us worth even more.

But what if we denied our worth in his eyes? What if we decided we didn’t want to be part of his call to all people everywhere to come to him? We’d be lost; and I think, like the song says, we wouldn’t know what we’d lost ‘til it’s gone. If you think I’m kidding, then pay attention to the story that follows the first two in Luke. You know it well: the story of the prodigal son. It takes up the rest of Chapter 15. Now, I don’t propose to read all 22 of the verses. You know the story. A younger son decides that living in his father’s house and being part of the family isn’t worth all that much. He’d rather have the money,

his share of the inheritance. He goes away, in body and in mind; indeed, he'd already gone far away in spirit before he ever left the property. And he went far away in every respect – the wild living, the dissipating of the money, the apparent consorting with prostitutes – these were things way away from the things his family believed. He had friends who set his worth in the money he had. We know that, because when the money ran out, the friends ran off. Now he was completely lost – and penniless. He even had to violate his own deep-held beliefs by slopping pigs in order to survive. He literally didn't know what he'd lost 'til it was gone.

Somewhere deep inside himself he knew that there was someone out there who thought he was worth a lot. He was sorry that he had gone the way he had. He knew that he needed to repent, which is to say, turn around. So he did – he turned around, and he headed back home to a father who thought he was worth everything. You know the rest of the story. His father had been looking down the road for him – that's what it means when Luke tells us he saw him from far away – hoping against hope that this lost son would come home. Why? Because that son was worth more to him than everything else in the world. Why else would he spend a bunch of money and resources on a big party to celebrate his return? Especially since he'd already given him all the money he was due! It's just like Jesus said: there is much rejoicing over one sinner who repents, who comes home, more than anything else.

So, my friends, my brothers and sisters, I remind you, I urge you, to remember how much you are worth to our Lord. He thought so much of you, he came and offered his life for you, and sent his Holy Spirit to be with you. And every time you repent of

whatever sin you have, you cause him and the angels of heaven to rejoice and celebrate. If you remember how “worthy” you are, you’ll be great tools for our Lord, as he goes out and finds the other lost ones through you. Then it’ll be your turn to join in the rejoicing, as the celebration for the “found” people begins...