

*“You Are Valuable!”*

[The “*Priceless Christian Music Video*” was shown following the Scripture Reading.]

That video puts a spotlight on a special portion of today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading, which I am focusing on in conjunction with the title of this message, “You Are Valuable!” The video asked the question, “What is Your Value?” Have you thought about your value – felt good or bad about your self-perceived value? That media presentation went on to remind us of several types of ways, many – if not most of us, have thought about our value. It declared, “You probably Have A Number – Credit Score – Income – Net Worth – Retirement Need – Your Insured Life.

The video went on to remind us, “All this adds up to very little in God’s Economy. For God’s cost to redeem your life was the life of His Only Son. For God so loved the WORLD that He gave His Only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).” The audio visual asked, “What is your VALUE?” It answered its question, “It was set by GOD over 2000 years ago And is still TO THIS DAY – Priceless!”

In the context of our Scripture Reading, what difference does our value make? Jesus warned his disciples of the bad intentions of some, who were against him and his followers. In the midst of his revelation of their future conflicts, he told them in **verse 26a**, “*do not be afraid of people.*” In part of his explanation as to why they and we should not be afraid of other persons, Jesus taught about how valuable we are to God in **verses 29-31**, “*For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!*”

Taking the video and verses 29-31 of the Scripture together, we are reminded that we are “Priceless” to God – our Divine Parent is very concerned for our welfare! The Only Son of God was sent to demonstrate God’s Love for us – showing our great worth to the Creator. This same Creator, Who is so connected with us – knows how many hairs we have on our heads. I trust God appreciates how easy I made that task. Our Maker looks after and cares even for a sparrow, while holding us to be of much greater value than many sparrows!

Returning to the context of why Jesus told his disciples to not be afraid of other people, the implication is clear. God’s love for us – how much our Divine Parent values us explains why God will provide the ultimate victory over the foes of our Savior!

During Jesus’ public ministry, he frequently demonstrated the great value of people, even of those, who were rejected and oppressed by their society. One of the reasons the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law were so opposed to him was his welcoming of outcasts and others judged to be “sinners” by the legalist of their community. Unfortunately, many folks in local churches have much in common with that judgmentalism of the adversaries of Jesus than with his Radical and Extravagant Welcome and Love. This sad state of affairs has been demonstrated over the generations by the rejection and ostracization of persons, who have been seen as too strange or as too different from God’s supposed standards. This type of legalistic approach has resulted in great pain and oppression in the lives of many hurting people. Jesus’ teaching and revelation in today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading affirms your, my, and everyone else’s great value to our Divine Parent. This gives Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, additional encouragement to follow our God Is Still Speaking emphasis of sharing God’s and Jesus’ Agape Love and Radical and Extravagant Invitation and Welcome with all people!

On a more personal basis, it is very comforting to be reminded Jesus declared you, me, and everyone else are of great value to our Maker and Sustainer! Every person has times of difficulty, perhaps, even despair. Knowing you are valuable to our Divine Parent and that our God will give us the final victory over evil, injustice, and oppression, along with welcoming us into the New Faith Relationship and the New Life in Christ and, finally, the Fulfilled Kingdom of God comforts and strengthens us, so we are able to endure and live out our New Faith Relationship with God! Because we are held to be so valuable by our Divine Parent, we are able to trust – faith in God’s Trustworthiness, Love, and Forgiving Grace!

What is most important between God and ourselves is the New Faith Relationship – one of Love and of highly valuing the other members of the relationship – our Creator, Jesus Christ, one another, and all who are receptive to it. That was why Jesus went on to tell his followers in **verse 32**, ***“Those who declare publicly that they belong to me, I will do the same for them before my Father in heaven.”*** The importance of this loving New Faith Relationship with God is also why Jesus sounded very harsh in the portions of our Scripture where he talked about the conflict and rejection his followers would experience with persons, who are in relationships with them but not in the New Faith Relationship with God. Discussing this dynamic, Barbara Brown Taylor said, “The gospel is not a table knife but a sword. It can set free and it can divide. The gospel is not Pablum. It is powerful stuff, powerful enough to challenge the most sacred human ties, but as frightening as it is, it is not finally to be feared”. (from the sermon, “Family Values,” in Gospel Medicine)

That insight leads us to an important implication for our lives. Jesus hinted at it when he said in **verse 25**, ***“So a pupil should be satisfied to become like his teacher”***. You, me, and all who have allowed God’s Agape Love to break into their lives are to follow Jesus’ example of valuing and loving others. Our New Faith Relationship with God and New Life in Christ is not merely a cognitive works righteousness. If we do not follow Jesus’ lead to love and welcome everyone, even those rejected by society or the religious culture, then we are not, in fact, living the New Faith Relationship with God and New Life in Christ. Jesus explained this in **verse 38**, ***“Those who do not take up their cross and follow in my steps are not fit to be my disciples.”*** Jesus went on to frame this slightly differently – contrasting the rejecting of the New Faith Relationship with God and New Life in Christ in order to seek personal gain over against living faithfully in the New Faith Relationship with God and New Life in Christ. Jesus told his disciples and us in **verse 39**, ***“Those who try to gain their own life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake will gain it.”***

You are very valuable to your Divine Parent! God has demonstrated this by sending the Almighty’s Only Son to manifest our Creator’s Love for us. By his life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ has been the ultimate expression of God’s Agape Love and high valuing of us! If you are in need of comfort, healing, forgiveness, grace, and love, then rejoice and live out the God Is Still Speaking Radical and Extravagant Invitation and Welcome. Knowing – Faithing you are God’s Beloved, enjoy and live this New Faith Relationship with God and New Life in Christ! Fulfill your call by following Jesus’ example of acceptance, welcome, and agape love. Yes, “take up” your “cross” – serve God’s and Jesus’ love and be a wonderful manifestation of it toward all people! Amen.