

<sup>7</sup>For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. <sup>8</sup>If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

<sup>9</sup>For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. (Romans 14:7-9 NIV)

An American tourist once visited Paris, and while he was there, he purchased an inexpensive amber necklace in a trinket shop. However, when he returned to America and passed through customs, he was shocked on having to pay a very high duty on what seemed to be a cheap necklace.

So the man decided to have it appraised. After looking at the object under a powerful magnifying glass, the jeweler said, "I'll give you \$25,000 for it." Greatly surprised, the man decided to have another expert examine it. When he did, he was offered \$10,000 more!

The astonished man asked, "What do you see that's so valuable about this old necklace? The jeweler replied, "Look through this glass." And there before his eyes was this inscription: "From Napoleon Bonaparte to Josephine." The value of the necklace came from its identification with a famous person.

As Christians, we are identified with One who is far more important than any human being. We belong to Christ, and it is from this position that the Christian finds his true identity and worth. As Paul wrote to the Philippians:

"<sup>8</sup> . . . I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, <sup>11</sup>and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:7-11 NIV).

The problem is that because of our sinful nature we do not always consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul said that he considers everything rubbish compared to being found in Christ, but that word "rubbish" is actually a rather weak translation from the Greek. It literally means stinking garbage or refuse. It means the stuff found in cesspools. It means that there is not enough money or pleasure or person or thing in this world worth going to hell over! Everything in life that pulls us away from Christ is stinking refuse! Paul is saying that the only true treasure in the world is Christ and the salvation that is found in Him.

But every day of our lives, in some manner or form, we choose the “rubbish”! By nature, we put more value on the things of this world than on Christ. So, hearing His Word and receiving His sacrament become options to do if nothing else more “worthy” turns up. So, being mindful of His commandments that we might strive to live as God would have us live become burdens that interfere with our “fun” or “position” or “wants” in life. And St. Paul also understood this truth as he struggled with his own sin.

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24-25 NIV)

Yes! What wretched people we are by nature. But thanks be to God who saves us from this body of death. You see, if someone could look under a spiritual magnifying glass, they would see something inscribed on our forehead and upon our heart that identifies us with the only person worth “knowing” in the world. They would see just how precious we are to Christ Jesus. That inscription is the sign of the cross made on us in our baptism, for that is where the true worth of a Christian comes from. It is the truth that through our God-given faith in Christ, we were buried with Him into His death that we might share in His resurrection from the dead (Romans 6).

That truth is an astonishing thing! The world and our sinful nature looks at Christ and His salvation as nothing more than a cheap necklace in relation to what the world seems to offer. That truth means that whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord! That truth means that Jesus is the Lord of both the dead and the living, and in Him your identity is His robes of righteousness. Because of Him God sees no sin, He sees no stinking refuse attached to us. He sees us as being washed clean in the blood of the Lamb who was slain.

So, how do you see your own worth? Do you see yourself as someone worth so much that the Son of God would die your death on the cross for your sin? Do you see yourself as someone so worthy that the Lord of Life wants to meet with you in His Word and Sacrament each week to give you His words of eternal life? You may be nothing more than a cheap necklace to the world, but you are precious beyond understanding to the Almighty and Living God! God grant all members of Trinity to seriously consider the extra opportunity we have to meet with Jesus during our mid-week Lenten services. In those services as we recall His bloody Passion, we truly learn of our real worth to Him.

On my heart imprint Thine image, Blessed Jesus, King of Grace,

That life’s riches, cares, and pleasures Have no pow’r Thee to efface.

This the superscription be: Jesus, crucified for me,

Is my Life, my hope’s Foundation, And my Glory and Salvation. (TLH 179)