

Sermon for Proper 17

The Text: Matthew 16:21-28

Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so that we may deny ourselves and receive the life of Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is the price of life?

Well, I suppose that might depend on the context of the question.

If we were asked by a life insurance salesman what the price of life is, he would usually value it as the sum of our financial commitments and the price of setting our loves ones up without those commitments. Therefore the price of life will vary by age.

For example, if we were 10 years old, we wouldn't have any financial commitments, so therefore we wouldn't need very much life insurance cover if any at all.

But if we were 40 years old, have a mortgage of around \$100,000, a car loan of \$20,000, and have a spouse and two children, then our life insurance cover should be for at least these commitments, plus a very generous amount so that our family could live comfortably without any need to take out any other loans etc.

Yet if we were 70 years old, and no longer have any financial commitments or family to support, then our need for life insurance becomes lower again.

So what is the price of life according to a life insurance salesman? It is the calculated cost of liabilities and perceived needs to cover any loss of life.

But what if a mother dies in an accident? What is the price of life then? How is it measured?

Well, the family may receive a payment from a life insurance company, but no matter how much money they receive, it never makes up for the life of a wife and mother. The same could be said for the loss of a father or the loss of a child. The price of life in this case can't be calculated financially. Money, property or anything else is almost useless and empty of comfort and meaning.

They say that 'money can't buy me love', but it also can't buy or replace life. It's strange that at the time of death, life suddenly crystallises: family is important, relationships are important, people are important. A lifetime chasing after money, property, fame or other worldly attractions is suddenly put into perspective. None of these things are important when a life is lost.

But what if a death was the result of an accident or a murder?

Then the price of life will often change, and it becomes possible to calculate the price of life again. The price of life is justice or revenge. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life!

If someone hurts us, then we want to hurt them back with interest. If someone takes away a loved one, then we want them to receive the same punishment, or worse if possible!

But even if we were to have someone receive every punishment we wished them to receive, would that really make things better? Would revenge make our loved one come back? Would we ever be truly happy with the payment? Would the price of revenge or justice be payment enough for our loved one's life? We often discover that even with revenge, the price of life still remains immeasurable.

So, even though the cost of life for insurance is often calculated financially, and the cost of life when someone has taken away a loved one is often justice or revenge, the price of life often can't be calculated.

Knowing the price of our life can't be estimated or valued by any earthly measurements, how much would our eternal life be worth? If we struggle to name a large enough price for the life of our loved ones who we have known for only a few years, then how on earth do we calculate the price for their eternal life, or even our own eternal life? If, at the time of death, we suddenly realise all things on earth are almost worthless when compared with the life of loved ones, then how much are we willing to pay or give up to ensure we will receive that eternal life with Jesus and our loved ones in faith?

But even the price of our eternal life is beyond price. Even if we were to give up our whole life and everything we have, it wouldn't be enough. Nothing we say, think or do will pay for or measure the cost of our eternal life. Even if we gave up everything we have, it still wouldn't be enough. The price for our life, especially for our eternal life is too high...at least for us.

Yet the price of our life, even our eternal life has been measured. Our price is the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is how much our life is worth. It's a price we can't pay; yet Jesus has willingly paid the full price. The suffering and death of God's own beloved Son is our price for life. It was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, to suffer many things, to die and even to arise again so that our relationship with God would be restored. It was necessary he did these things, because this is the price of our lives and the price for God's justice.

Yet what many people misunderstand is that even though Jesus has paid the full price for our lives, there is a cost involved for us. The cost is our obedience; yet don't think that the price we pay in our obedience actually contributes or makes up for the suffering and death of Jesus, or that what we do actually earns us 'brownie' points before God.

Jesus has paid the full price for our eternal life. There is nothing more to pay. Our obedience doesn't pay for our lives or the lives of others in any way, shape or form, but there is a danger we can exchange this undeserving gift for other fleeting worldly things through our disobedience.

If we try to deny Jesus and what he has done for us by living according to the world's thinking, then we will forfeit our eternal life. Yet if we lose our life for Jesus' sake, dedicate ourselves to following him, following his guidance, and obeying his instructions for life, then we will enjoy the blessings of eternal life in heaven.

Since the payment for our life involved sacrifice on the cross, our own life of following Jesus also involves a cross. The crosses we bear as we follow Jesus are the crosses of sacrifice and suffering on account of our following Jesus.

Following Jesus into eternal life is not easy and glorious. It often means living in a way that does not look the same as everyone else. It means being obedient to God's Word, even if we don't fully understand the reasons for his instructions. It means giving up precious time on earth to listen to Jesus speak to us. It means giving up our need to satisfy ourselves with money, possessions, fame and other wants. It means giving up living the way we want to for our own pleasure and trying to live Jesus' way of service and sacrifice.

Following Jesus also means we will be persecuted and insulted for living according to Jesus' way and not the world's. We will not always 'fit in'. The world will try to set the agenda as to what is acceptable and right, but this will not be the same as what Jesus says. The people of this world will continue to gain a name or a profit for themselves, but we will live unselfishly and in humbleness as we follow Jesus. We must obey God and not the world; after all, the things of mankind will not last and will actually lead us away from Jesus and the life he has gained for us.

The price for our life has been measured and paid in full. Even though we do not measure up, Jesus willingly allowed himself to suffer and die for us. Jesus paid the price of our disobedience by his obedience. He remained sinless to save those who are sinful. In other words, he suffered and died for our life.

Our own journey as we follow Jesus will also involve suffering, and a dying to our own selfish desires, but it will also lead to eternal life with Jesus and all others who follow in faith.

What is the price of life? The suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore let us heed the words of Hymn 336 in the Lutheran hymnal which says:

Then let us follow Christ, our Lord,
Bearing the cross appointed,
And, firmly clinging to His Word,
In suffering be undaunted.
Who will not bear the battle's strain
The crown of life shall ne'er obtain.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.