

Philippians 3:4b-14 All Things Lost
John 12:1-8
Isaiah 43:16-21
April 6, 2025

There is a curious relationship between human beings and the world around them. We are certainly a part of that world, but we are also, certainly, distinct from it. We can recognize this distinction in the way people interact with their *natural surroundings*; and in terms of the way people interact with *each other* at work and at home, and as members of the groups in which they are a part, which creates a way of being in what is also called, “the world.”

In a passage from the 3rd chapter of Philippians, which serves as the epistle reading for the day, Paul speaks of this relationship, and the conclusion he has reached after having lived in this world and by its values. Let me read it in two parts, one now and one later, towards the end of the message. Paul writes;

“If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were *gains* to me I now consider *loss* for the sake of Christ.”

We live in this world and are a part of its life. Yet the best advice that we can be given and have been given

is to count it all as a loss in favor of knowing Christ. Natural life ends in death and we are a part of its cycles; all the various human relationships are temporary; life in Christ leads to resurrection and eternity.

Therefore everything we experience as a part of this world’s life is to be considered, worthless. Countless people among the faithful have been challenged and inspired by these words.

As we will hear later, Paul speaks about a righteousness based on law, that is, obedience to rules; acceptance of instruction, doctrinal affirmations; and he sets it all next to a life from God apprehended by faith. We are compelled to direct our thoughts from the mundane world all around to the eternal realm, what Jesus called the Kingdom of God.

Even though the world persists in its present form, believers have been invited to entertain a different world altogether, characterized by a liberation from the attachments of this world; a greater peace, a stronger resolve, a prioritizing of day-to-day demands, and a deeper experience of God’s presence.

In the gospel reading we also see an example; a variation on the same theme, of life attached to the present order, when an event of eternity happened right in front of them. Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, anoints Jesus with a very expensive perfume.

There were two possible levels of meaning. Judas Iscariot, of all people, saw it only as a waste of expensive perfume, only in terms of its economic value. Jesus saw it for its higher meaning, that she was anointing him for his burial, a reference to his death, which signaled a tragic loss in the world's terms, but a great gain for the world in spiritual terms.

Like Paul, with all his religious accomplishments, we also are able to make a list according to the values of this world, of important things; including possessions, achievements, even priceless relationships with friends and family, and in other settings, citizenship, things associated with the way life is ordered politically, economically, and socially.

All these things and so much more of the world's life come and go, and have their time; even as we come and go and have our time, but in themselves have no eternal significance.

They do not cease to have earthly importance. As a matter of fact, when faith compels us in the direction of eternity, of the, "one thing needful," to use an expression from a previous encounter between Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and Jesus, the other things are given their true meaning under God. We may think of gospel values.

It is when we lose the measure of eternity that the things of earth take on excessive meaning beyond their weight, and create excess and distortion and poor judgement, and lead to frustration and confusion,

disappointment and exhaustion, eventually failures of faith and love.

As we move deeper into the Lenten season on the way to Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday, and on to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter itself, we are reminded once again of gospel values, that teach what is of the highest and truest importance, and also what is at best secondary, having no intrinsic value.

Counting all things loss sets up the opportunity at least for all things to have their proper place; and it liberates us for life's journey still ahead; and produces a sensible grounding in reality, associated with both this life and the next, an appreciation for the relationship with God in which we learn the love and forgiveness and acceptance that is our true destiny.

As we come to this brief moment between the message and Holy Communion, we will sing, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, one of the great hymns of the faith from Isaac Watts, the 18th century pastor and theologian whose poetic words have helped us in our appreciation of the cross itself;

Alas and did my Savior bleed
And did my sovereign die.
Would he devote that sacred head
for sinners such as I;

and in this case was inspired by the very text from Philippians which has spoken to us today.

First, listen to the completion of the reading, and then sing, and then share Communion. Allow these few minutes to reshape the understanding of the meaning of our lives;

“What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 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 on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

There is a curious relationship between people and the world around them. We are a part of that world, but we are also distinct from it; set apart from it by God’s call in Christ.

In this moment, as we approach the throne of grace, which this altar table represents, where the bread and the cup await the blessing, let us seek to give our supreme attention to eternal things; to knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection, and participation in his sufferings; for the sake of Christ. Amen.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)