

Worth

Acts 4.5-12 / Jn.10.11-18

What's it worth to you? How much will you give me for it? Questions like these are all about how we value something. And TV is full of shows which depend on how things are valued – the Antiques Road Show, which I suppose this village has a vested interest in, as one of the experts lives here, but also programmes like Flog It. About ten days ago, I held the most amazing banknote in my hand. I have never held anything which seemed so valuable. It said on it 'Ten Trillion Dollars'. Wow! But that was very misleading. It was a real banknote. It was worth ten trillion dollars – but only Zimbabwe dollars. I am told it was actually worth about 2 or 3p.

I expect you have taken part in that exercise where you are asked what you would grab from your house if it was burning down – what is most precious to you. Just have a think what that might be. Maybe you would like to find out what your neighbour would choose – and tell them your choice.

I suspect that you will not have gone for the thing which would fetch the most in a saleroom, or the thing which has the highest insurance value. I guess you will have gone for something which has most meaning for you – what is most irreplaceable. And perhaps what we would choose changes at different times of life. I have brought with me this morning something which I suspect would have been the choice of one of my children when they were small. Every parent here will have suffered from the trauma of a missing cuddly – a tragedy of the first order. But the fact that this one is still in our house, and not where that person now lives says a lot about how values change! Sometimes we get a shock when we hear how people put different values on things. Think for a moment of the value of the Crown Jewels – you will know if you have been the Tower of London how securely they are guarded. Their value is incalculable. Yet at the Coronation, surrounded by all those jewels, this was said to the Queen: 'Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords.' The Bible – in the words of the Coronation Service, more valuable than all those jewels.

We heard in both our readings lessons about how people value things differently. In our reading from Acts, Peter tells the High Priest and the other VIPs that he has cured a man in the name of Jesus. And he doesn't mince his words. He says Jesus was a stone rejected by them, but in Peter's view, a stone which has become the cornerstone – the stone which holds the two sides of building together and prevents it collapsing. They have valued Jesus as zilch. Peter and the other Christians value Jesus as the greatest thing of all. So that is a question we could ask of ourselves this morning. How do we value Jesus – as a society, as a community? But even more important, how does each of us individually value Jesus? Jesus himself told stories about people selling everything they had to buy a pearl of immense value, or to buy a field with a treasure in it – and those things were God's kingdom. And Jesus is the King.

We also heard in the gospel Jesus talking about himself as the Good Shepherd. For the good shepherd, the value he places on his sheep is infinite – he will even die for them. That is an extraordinary valuation isn't it? After all, the sheep is going to end up dead anyway – that is why they are bred and cared for. But the good shepherd values the living sheep enough to risk his own life to preserve it. And of course that is the story we are celebrating at this time of year – that Jesus laid down his life for his flock, but is alive for evermore. God values us so highly that he gave his Son to live and die and rise again for us. That is what we are worth to him.

And that we act out in Baptism this morning. Because it is not a question of God valuing the whole of the human race, but of the value God puts on Emily and Evie – and of course on every single one of us. Each of us individually is of infinite worth to God – Jesus underlined that in another of his sayings about being the Good Shepherd – he would leave the 99 in the sheepfold and go searching for the one who was lost.

And if that is how much we are worth to God, it challenges us to go on re-valuing what he is worth to us. Let me end with a story I told in the Parish Mag a couple of months ago. The medieval scholar Muretus was a poor man, and having been taken ill in the street and carried off to a hospital, the doctors looked at this shabby creature and said it wasn't worth treating someone like him. He opened his eyes and said to them in the Latin they spoke thinking he didn't understand, 'Call no man worthless for whom Christ died.' What we celebrate in our Communion and our Baptism this morning is that valuation God has placed on Emily, Evie, you and me.

