

How much is a person worth?

If you would ask Apple that question when it comes to their CEO, Tim Cook, the answer would be a little over \$15.5 million in 2018. That works out to \$43K per day.

Mike Trout, the LA Angels star outfielder and highest paid athlete in America signed a 12 year \$430 million dollar contract. That's \$61k every time he steps to the plate, or \$4000 every single hour for the next 12 years of his life.

For a while now folks have tried to put a price tag on stay at home moms. Between cleaning, cooking, chauffeuring, and being an amateur child psychologist in 2018 it was estimated that the average stay at home mom deserved a \$162k salary.

Other scientists have looked at what our bodies are actually made of (the elements that make up the average human body; oxygen, carbon, sodium, potassium, etc.), and come up with the figure \$140. If you broke down my body into its basic elements and sold them off, you'd be \$140 richer.

How much is a person worth?

Well, at the end of the day, the good capitalist answer is: as much as someone is willing to pay.

Much like if you would take your house, plop it in the middle of a corn field in Nebraska or in the heart of Silicon Valley, the value of the same house will be very different because your house is only worth what people are willing to pay for it.

So, how much is a person worth? How much am I worth?

It depends on how much someone would pay for me – which is what makes Jesus' parables today so amazing. If I'm worth what someone would pay for me, then according to Jesus. I'm worth an awful lot; and so are you.

Luke chapter 15 is known as the Seeking and Saving chapter of the Bible. Jesus said, **"I came to seek and to save the lost."** And Luke 15 brings us face to face with that side of Jesus through three beautiful parables. Pastor Adams read two of them just a minute ago, and the third is the famous parable of the Lost (or Prodigal) Son. A person is worth what you will pay for them, and Luke 15 tells me about a Jesus who was willing to pay a lot.

You've got the shepherd who is counting up his sheep. He's got 100 of them. He gets to number 99 and he's out of sheep. Now he could write that one sheep off to just the cost of doing business. Shepherding was a hard and dangerous job and sheep weren't worth all that terribly much in and of themselves. But that one sheep was worth something to this shepherd. To this shepherd, no loss is an acceptable loss, so he leaves the 99 behind, goes out, finds the lost sheep, throws it over his shoulders, and carries it home, rejoicing – because he cared about this 1-out-of-100 sheep, and he was genuinely glad he found it.

You've got a woman who loses one of her ten coins. It was a drachma, a coin worth a day's wage, a coin not worth all that terribly much, but it was important to this woman. So, she breaks out the broom and the lamp and carefully searches until she finds it. A smile creeps across her face. She is so happy; she just has to tell her friends.

And this is what my Jesus is to me – the one who sought me; the one who saved me; the one who was willing to pay for me.

My value is not what scientists could get for breaking me down and selling me off. My value is not what you pay me to be your pastor. My value is not what my family would be willing to pay to keep me around. My value is in how far that shepherd would go, how long that woman would search, the lengths to which my Jesus would go to find me and claim me as his own.

And you and I know that Jesus' seeking and saving was way more intense, would demand way more from Jesus that just searching hills for a lost sheep, or getting on your hands and knees to sift through a pile of dirt for a lost coin. Jesus' seeking would cost him everything.

A person is worth what someone is willing to pay for them. My God looked at me, he looked at his Son, and he said, "I'll give him up, if I can have you." As a father myself, that is mind-blowing – to think of handing over one of my kids to an executioner, so that I could save a stranger - and not even a stranger, but a sinner – this is crazy. But this is the value our Father puts on you and me.

And Jesus, the Son, sent to the executioner's cross, goes willingly. He hears his Father's command, "Go, die for them." He looks at us, he looks at the cross, and he values us enough to say, "Yeah, I'll do that. They are worth that to me."

This is crazy. This is incredible. This is... this is my Jesus. This is your Jesus.

He seeks and when he finds, he saves, and when he saves he rejoices, not just Jesus, but all of heaven was waiting on baited breath for him to find me and save me so they too could join in the celebration.

A person is worth what someone will pay for them. You and I, friends, are priceless in our Father's eyes. Just let that sink in. All of us are born with the deep desire to be loved, to know that someone values us, cares about us, considers us worth the space we fill up – in our Jesus we have the evaluation we crave. We mean something because Jesus says so. And he doesn't just say so, his seeking and saving all the way to the cross puts his money where his mouth is.

You are priceless.

But of course, Jesus didn't come to seek and to save you and I alone.

These words of Jesus speak some amazing truths about my personal value, and how I should feel about myself based on what God feels about me. They also speak some important truths about all the other people in my life and in this world, about their value, and about how I should feel about them based on what God feels about them.

And here is an opportunity for some good, honest self-reflection.

The reality is we humans are not always very good at valuing each other.

That truth is what prompted Jesus to tell these parables in the first place.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law were muttering because, “**This man welcomes ‘sinners’ and eats with them.**” They looked at people who didn’t even seem to be trying – they weren’t trying to meet the basic moral and social standards of the day. They looked at them and they felt they were looking down at them.

We humans are not always very good at valuing each other.

From a distance, with hindsight, it is so easy to see how ugly this muttering by the Pharisees and teachers of the law is. None of us here today are cheering for the Pharisees. We all know how ugly it is when one human devalues another human.

But you know what comes next, right? Times may have changed since then, but hearts, not so much. It’s not really a matter of *if* we ever act like the Pharisees, but *how* we act like the Pharisees. We too are not always very good at valuing people the way God does.

It happens in lots of very subtle ways. The devil is very good at getting us to think about and treat the people around us as less than priceless.

Maybe one good prompting in the interest of self-reflection today is to ask yourself this question: who are the people in your life about whom you think, “My life would be better without you in it.”

Often our hearts go that way when we are forced to work closely with someone who is very different than us. At home, or work, or even in this congregation, there are some people who just go about life very differently than you. They have different priorities. They have different plans and ideas for family or work or ministry. They go about accomplishing things very differently than you.

Sometimes it is the people out there who don’t just think differently, but live differently (all those people that we might label “sinner”) – people who don’t seem to give a rip for the morals and values you have as a Christian; people who aren’t even interested in trying to live the way you think all people should; people who may even look at you and your Christian values and call them wrong – whether it is people “in here” or “out there”, it is so easy to look at people very different than you and to think, “My life would be better without you.”

And there is the Pharisee, forgetting that our Father would not be happy to live without those very people we don’t think are worth our time, let alone our love.

And I know I’m not alone. I look at the terrible things people say to and about each other behind the safety of a screen; I listen to how Republicans talk about Democrats and how Democrats talk about Republicans; I listen to Boomers talk about Millennials and Millennials talk about Boomers; I look at the ways people treat each other out in the world, and even in this church... We humans are not always very good at valuing each other. And often, the less we have in common, the more obvious that becomes.

There is a real opportunity for reflection in Jesus’ words today. Do you value people (*all* people) the way Jesus does?

But here we are again; right back where we started – the value Jesus gives humanity, you and me included.

Those people in your life who are different than you, who may not seem to be all that valuable to you because they make your life more difficult or messy, they are worth what Jesus was willing to pay for them. And so are you.

This is our Jesus who came to seek and to save *the lost*! Valuing each other the way that Jesus does starts by realizing that we *all* fall into the category of “sinner”. We are all lost. And Jesus came to save lost sinners. He came to seek and to save those who are still lost out there, and my own heart that wanders from the path Jesus would have me take.

All of heaven waits on baited breath for you and I to realize how much we need a seeking and saving Jesus. All of heaven throws a party today, like every day, he seeks me. He finds me. He throws me over his shoulders, and carries me back.

Friends, you are priceless. And so is every other person on this planet.

God give us hearts that rejoice with the angels in heaven that our Savior has found us. God give us hearts to value all of humanity enough to love them the way Jesus loves them.

Amen.