

Sermon Preached by Pr. Jennifer Rose
Palm Sunday
Jesus: Trash or treasure?

Dear friends in Christ: Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Oh, the amazing things that you can find in the garbage!

Some of you may remember the true story from twenty years ago of the man from Philadelphia who discovered something unusual in an old picture he bought for four dollars at a flea market in Adamstown, Pennsylvania. It was something he purchased because he liked the frame. When he tried to remove the frame from the painting, the frame fell apart in his hands. What he found appeared to be an old copy of the Declaration of Independence.

Upon the advice of a friend he took it to an appraiser who informed him that it was real. It was one of 500 official copies from the first printing of the Declaration. In fact it turned out to be one of the three finest in existence, as crisp as it was on the evening it was printed by John Dunlap to carry the news of America's independence to the people of the thirteen colonies. Later, when the auction house gavel finally dropped on the sale of this amazing piece of history, it was for a price of \$2.42 million dollars. Nine years later it sold again for more than eight million dollars.

It was during the years in between those auctions that an American television show began to appear on the Public Broadcasting System. Perhaps you've seen it. Its name is *The Antiques Roadshow* and it's billed as "part adventure, part history lesson, and part treasure hunt." In each Roadshow episode, highly trained specialists and dealers offer free appraisals of antiques and collectibles, capturing tales of family heirlooms, yard sale bargains and long lost items salvaged from attics and basements.

Part of the fascination of this show lies in the featured items themselves. There was the Navajo blanket of a type so rare that there are only fifty in the world. There was the five hundred year old helmet from Milan, Italy, that was crafted from single sheet of metal and then highlighted with gold. There was also the collection of signatures from every Presidential cabinet member from the administrations of George Washington all the way to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

There is also fascination in the stories of how the items came into the possession of the current owners. There was the impressionist painting given to the owner's physician

grandfather in payment of medical services rendered. There was the other painting that just happened to come along with the modest house that the owner's parents purchased in the 1940's. There was the thousand year old Aztec pottery that the owner found in a roadside stand.

Then, finally, there is our fascination with the dollar amounts involved. Of course, there are those items whose value must have been already generally known. The fellow with all those Presidential Cabinet signatures certainly knew he had something special on his hands; only the million dollar price tag may have surprised him.

Even more compelling, though, are the stories of genuine discovery, the stories of the people who bring things to these traveling shows not knowing whether they have a piece of junk, or a piece of history. That painting that came along with the World War II home that proved to be worth eighty thousand dollars. The simple painting of the Pennsylvania Dutch countryside worth \$120,000. The collection of simple sketches by Whistler passed on from a father to a daughter that was worth a quarter million dollars to any number of museums around the world.

And so the list grows of those hundreds or even thousands of people who have come to these roadshows in cities like Baltimore and Bismark, and Memphis and Mobile. They've come in hopes of rediscovering some great value that had been there all along. It's fascinating. I wonder about all the wonderful learning that goes on, and about the new sense of appreciation that people must feel, and even about the lives that are changed simply because someone had come to town who knew something, and had a passion and wanted to share it. I think about all that incredible, even surpassing value bringing brought out of the dark and into the light.

And when I do, I can't help but remember Jesus. I can't help but think about the road that he traveled and the all the stops along the way, and all the men, women and children into whose lives he came.

And when we read about that last year of his life, Jesus' path took him from Nazareth, to places with names like Capernaum and Gennesaret, and Tyre and Sidon. It was a road that would lead him back to Nazareth, and then to Caesarea and Philippi and Jericho, and finally to Jerusalem, of course.

It was a road that would take him into so many lives. The lives of lepers and Roman centurions and paralytics. The lives of his disciples, and of daughters of synagogue leaders. God's road took him into the lives of tax collectors, and fallen men and women, and sinners of all different kinds. It took him into the private homes of women with

names like Martha and Mary, and it placed him before him streaming crowds of those gathered along the seaside, and the mountainside, and on the valley floor. They came into his presence because they had heard, and wanted to know and needed to believe.

And everywhere he went, Jesus left behind rediscovered lives. The sick who discovered what it meant to be sound of body once more. The afflicted who discovered what it meant to be sound of mind once again. Again and again and again as he took to the road, Jesus of Nazareth left behind lives of rediscovered limbs, and rediscovered sight, and rediscovered speech. As he moved along the road he left behind a trail of rediscovered love, and rediscovered faith. Everywhere he went - Jesus left behind a trail of rediscovered life. And for all those folks along the way, nothing would ever be quite the same. Now there was great value where once there seemed to be none. In the words of Paul - who met Jesus as he moved along his own road - "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view.....So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new. (2Corinthians 5: 16-17)

On this Palm Sunday, we remember that some 2000 years ago Jesus rode on a borrowed colt into Jerusalem. Poor people--the blind, the hungry, the naked and the sick--tore branches from the trees and marched with him, shouting, "Hosanna!" They gave him a celebration! He was loved and treasured and praised. And within days, because Jesus confronted all that was powerful in both religion and politics, he was crucified, dead, and buried in a borrowed grave.

We gather this morning to remember what, at the time, must have seemed a very small moment in human history. The Roman soldiers crucified Jesus at Golgotha, just outside of the holy city. Scholars and archaeologists tell us that Golgotha was, besides being a rock in the shape of a skull, the garbage dump of Jerusalem. The powers of evil that crucified Jesus thought they were throwing into the trash the pesky problem of God's inclusive, world-transforming, life-giving love, never to be bothered again. It was a small event for them; troublemakers like Jesus who threatened the religious and political order were crucified daily.

We are here today because from that garbage dump, God transformed the world and our human history forever. We gather today to give thanks that we have rediscovered the gift of life and purpose because of what God did in and for the garbage. We gather today to give thanks that because of Jesus, we aren't thrown into the trash (where we belong) and instead are discovered and claimed as God's children and promised a glorious inheritance - that we are given forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life.

May each of us - today and always - rejoice in the gift of our baptism - the gift of being called God's children- the gift of being God's treasure.

Thanks be to God. Amen.