

"THE MOST EXPENSIVE THING IN THE WORLD"

April 9, 1989

TEXT: I Corinthians 7:23 "You were redeemed at a tremendous cost; don't, therefore, sell yourselves as slaves to men."
(Phillips Translation)

There are, I suspect, some who wait till the sermon begins before they read their bulletins. But, if so, please note that this sermon has now started. So please take out your order of worship and look down to the place where the sermon is listed. There you will see that it is entitled, "The Most Expensive Thing in the World." Now, before we go any further, I would like you to think about that for a moment. Specifically, I would like you to think about what that "most expensive thing" might be.

Pretend, if you will, that this is last Monday afternoon, and you are the reference librarian at the Wauwatosa Public Library. Some crazy minister has just had his secretary call in to ask, "What's the most expensive thing in the world?" What would your answer be? And no fair cheating. You can stall for time by saying, "Please hold for a minute? I will have to look that up." But sooner or later you will have to get back on the phone with some kind of an answer. And I ask you once again, "What would your answer be?"

Well, perhaps I ought to confess that I did not get just one answer. As a matter of fact, I did not really ask for one. I had suspected there might be problems, so I told Betsy to ask for five or six of the most expensive things in the world. And here are some of the things the librarian told her, each, I would guess, the most expensive in its own particular category:

- 1) A half gallon saspirilla bottle, made in 1850, and now worth \$13,000,
- 2) A glass paperweight worth \$143,000,
- 3) The ruby slippers Judy Garland wore in "The Wizard of Oz", now worth \$165,000,
- 4) A ruby and diamond necklace worn by the Duchess of Windsor, worth \$2,603,308,
- 5) A 52.59 carat, flawless, emerald cut, white diamond worth \$7,480,000, and
- 6) Vincent Van Gogh's painting of "Irises" worth \$53,000,000.

Now, of course, some of you might say, as, frankly, I did, "Well, none of those are worth that much to me." But apparently they were to someone because that is what someone paid for them. And, when you get right down to it, that is probably one of our

better standards. After all, who really knows what anything is worth? Different people have very different standards.

For instance, I was reared right here in the Middle West. And I would much rather have a nice, juicy hamburger than the most expensive lobster in the world. And I do not even want to think about those salty little fish eggs some people think so special. I would be willing to bet that, if you called them "Salty Little Fish Eggs", instead of "Caviar", and sold them for \$1.29 a pound, no one would ever buy the nasty things.

But, you see, that is just my point. More often than not, our attitudes toward things depend on what they cost and not on what they are worth. William Bradford's Letter Book offers a personal account of the Pilgrims and their adventures. Yet, it was found in a Nova Scotia grocer's shop where the grocer used its pages for wrapping fish. Historians deem it priceless, but, obviously, the grocer had no idea of its great value. It had cost him nothing, so, apparently that is what he thought it to be worth.

On the other hand, most of us probably have at least one piece of expensive trash around the house. We do not like it. We have no real use for it. But we know it cost a lot of money, so we treat it with respect. And think of the guy who owned that dusty old saspirilla bottle. Perhaps he used it as a door stop, or kept kerosene in it. But you can bet his attitude changed when he learned it was worth \$13,000. If something costs little; we often do not appreciate it. But, let us just find out that it is expensive, and then we change our attitude.

And that is exactly what I would like us to do this morning, change our attitude. Because, you see, the most expensive thing in the world is YOU! Think about it for a moment. Your mother literally risked her life to carry you and give you birth. Your parents spent huge amounts of time, love, and money just to get you to the point where you could be on your own. I have seen estimates, for instance, that it costs an average of \$30,000 to rear a child to adulthood. And that does not include college. But it was not just the money. Think of all the care, the worry, the frustration, the self denial, the love, your parents also invested.

And, then, there are the social costs. One of the reasons people like to live in Sun City is that taxes are so low. I am told that taxes there on a hundred thousand dollar house are less than four hundred dollars a year. Why? Because they have no children. There are no schools. And schools cost money. Good schools cost a lot of money. And there are no juvenile authorities, no Boy Scouts, no Girl Scouts. And the recreation program does not need to provide any children's programs. And all that, not only lowers taxes, but saves on other costs as well. Children are our future, and they are well worth the investment. But they are expensive. You were expensive.

And that is just part of it. Consider, for instance, what you cost God. It used to be said that the chemicals which make up the human body were worth only ninety-eight cents.

1. Enough SULPHUR to rid a dog of fleas,
2. Enough FAT for six bars of soap,
(Some of us may be able to do a little better than that.)
3. Enough LIME to whitewash one chicken-coop,
4. Enough IRON for a 6-penny nail,
5. Enough PHOSPHORUS for twenty boxes of matches,
6. Enough POTASSIUM to explode a toy cannon --once,

But today we know better than that now. And I do not just mean inflation. Nuclear physics reveals that the atoms in the human body, properly harnessed, would produce 11,400,000 kilowatts of electric power --per pound. Now, I checked with Wisconsin Electric, and they tell me that the current domestic rate for electricity is 6.33 cents per kilowatt hour. That means you are worth more than \$720,000 a pound. The Six Million Dollar Man was a piker. If you weigh no more than one hundred pounds you are worth over seventy-two million. For that is what it cost God to use your molecules on you instead of electricity.

But much more important is what we have cost God in other ways. The whole Bible is a record of what it cost Him to bring us out of our own self-generated darkness into the light of His Love. The obedience of Moses was spent on us. The anger of Amos was spent on us. Hosea's compassion was spent on us. The tribulations of Israel were spent on us. And, when all else failed, the suffering of Jesus was spent on us.

For our sakes, the Son of God became flesh. For our sakes, He allowed Himself to be misunderstood, betrayed, and deserted. For our sakes, he was mocked, tortured, and crucified. For our sakes, he died the most humiliating and painful death a cruel age could devise. That is what you and I cost. And at least part of the Easter message is that God thinks we are worth it.

Or at least we can be worth it. A few minutes ago, probably without thinking very much about it, we sang together Ferdinand Blanchard's telling words:

"Before the cross of Jesus
Our lives are judged today;
The meaning of our eager strife
Is tested by his Way.
Across our restless living
The light streams from his cross
And by its clear revealing beams
We measure gain and loss.

"The hopes that lead us onward,
The fears that hold us back,
Our will to dare great things for God,
The courage that we lack,
The faith we keep in goodness,
Our love, as low or pure,
On all, the judgement of the cross
Falls steady, clear, and sure."

The judgement of the cross falls upon our lives because that is what we cost. No one would fault the owner of that \$13,000 dollar saspirilla bottle for filling it with saspirilla before he knew how expensive it was? But we would certainly expect him to put it to better use once he learned about its cost.

So this morning I would like to leave you with these questions: "Are you living up to your price tag?" "Does it really make sense to use anything as expensive as you are the way you've been using you?" And, last, but certainly not least, "Can't each of us find some use more suited to what we've cost?"

Our scripture lesson says, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct ." And St. Paul adds, "You have been redeemed at a tremendous cost; don't, therefore, sell yourselves as slaves to men." (I Cor. 7:23 in the J. B. Phillips Translation)