

*Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, 28.viii.2005, 9:00 a.m.  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Chanceford Twp., York Co., Pennsylvania  
Ante-Communion liturgy, LBW Setting 2  
Jeremiah 15:15-21; Psalm 26:1-8; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28*

## Jesu Juva !

Grace to you and peace, from Him Who is and Who was and Who  
is to come! ☩ Amen.

*Then Jesus told His Disciples: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”*

*--Matthew*

*16:21-28*

More questions from Jesus today, I'm afraid. His question to the Disciples from last Sunday is, I hope, still ringing in our ears: 'Who do *you* say that I am?' Today we hear: 'For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?' What?! How is it that, in 'losing' our life for His sake will 'find' that one life we have to lose or find, to live?

Ask yourself this question, perhaps, as a way of opening yourself to Jesus' question: Think of the last time you attended a

barn auction or an estate sale. What thought crosses your mind from time to time as you see those boxes of personal effects and knick-knacks, those pieces of furniture and tools displayed before a multitude of complete strangers, of whom you are one? Does it not occur to you that these things were *used* by someone, that they were part of what made a house a *home* to someone? Do you ask yourself whether some of those objects might not have been received as *gifts*? Do you not wonder why they were taken care of and kept, so that they now constitute almost the only material reminder of a life once lived, associated in the mind of the one now dead or bankrupt and moved away with a loved one or a happy time, meaning that is completely *lost* on us who have come to gawk and to bid and to possess the function and appearance of those things, for a price of money, but not their *personal meaning*, which is completely lost on us, a matter of indifference to us?

I think of these things, and that is why I do not attend auctions or estate sales any oftener than I absolutely must. And then I think, in thoughts that will bring me and perhaps also you

near to the sense of today's Gospel, what is it that will be left over from my life to be sold at auction, or thrown away? For what am I holding on to what I have and for what am I waiting to spend not only my money and possessions but *myself*? Am I saving it all for the estate sale some day, not using my life and all I have so that it will not break or wear out?

If the answer to that question is 'Yes,' then what a pity. What a pity not to risk service to others, not to live for the sake of Christ and for the sake of those Christ loves in this brief span of years, not to risk love. If we think that the *safe* way to live is to treat our lives like some sort of heirloom, keeping it safely hidden on the shelf, with the cabinet door shut and latched, then we have, as the Gospel says, *lost* our life by thinking we can leave it to others who will care no more for the memory of such a safely hidden life than for a set of antique salt and pepper shakers.

If, however, we *lose* our lives in the cause of Christ in this world, in self-giving, self-forgetting love, then something altogether different happens. In the act of risking *what* we have

we, and usually others, discover *who* we are. In that moment when the neighbor's need becomes of more concern to us than our fear of risking what we have we may find the image of God that was lost in us. In the deliberate and daily practice of such discovery and such risk, we take up the Cross of Him Whose whole concern was for our sake and the world's, and not His own. In some cases, in very many, in fact, the change in this world is noticeable where such a life has passed, transforming even the miscellaneous stockpile of the things we forgot to use for love from junk into relics, to the glory of the One Who gave all, Who lost all and to Whom all things were restored for Our sake. ✎ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever.

✎ Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria!**