

Pastor Roy's sermon from July 12, 2015

Was it worth it? Jonathan Trevino was a police officer on the Texas side of the Mexican border who was in charge of a narcotics squad which became corrupt. They sold and used confiscated drugs and money, sometimes escorting drug shipments along the highway. They enjoyed lavish lifestyles for about 2 years until they were caught. He says, "I want people to know that I'm human and I didn't wake up one day and say, 'I'm going to be a corrupt cop.' This is something that happened years after my career started, and it was a combination of temptation and greed. And I let it get the best of me." In a written statement he continues, "Most importantly, I would like to apologize to my family for the pain, suffering and embarrassment I have caused due to the selfish acts that I have committed. I'd also like to apologize to the citizens of Hidalgo County for abandoning them, and to all law enforcement for tarnishing the badge. You'll get away with it for a while, and think you're on top of the world. Then you'll get caught, and they'll send you here." (to prison). He admits that he is glad the squad was discovered and prosecuted. (National Public Radio, "All Things Considered," July 6, 2015, 4:30p). Was it worth it? Clearly to Jonathan, it was not.

I also remember listening to a resident at Country Meadows as he returned from visiting his life-long wife who was in the dementia care unit. I remember him repeating, I was faithful, I was always faithful. It sounded as though he had opportunities not to be so. But he made the decision and followed it. Was it worth it? I believe he believed it was, even though there was no crowd gathered around to applaud his faithfulness. Just a hallway with closed doors and a young chaplain who respected him and pitied him with an odd mixture of feelings.

We don't usually speak directly of these things, of our hard work and diligence. We all have our challenges. We make decisions. We live with consequences. We ask, "Was it worth it?"

What is it that makes us satisfied that it was all worthwhile? Do you think Amos wondered if it was worth it to speak the truth against the king and the priests and prophets? --Only to be effectively exiled or at least unwelcomed? "Oh, here comes that crazy shepherd, he spends too much time out there in the woods." But from the sound of Amos' writings, he thought it was worth it.

And John the Baptist, the end of his life spent in a squalid first century Roman prison, having proclaimed the message of repentance to the powers of leadership in Jewish and Roman culture and to the common people, only to have his head cut off as high entertainment for a wild dinner party. I believe he thought it was worth it, too. Of course, there is Jesus, who gave his energy and life on behalf of the poor and common folk, teaching, healing, loving compassionately, listening, and was run ragged, falsely accused, tortured, and crucified on a cross. What a price to pay for faithfulness.

What makes what we do and how we live worth it? It's personal. It's a question we ask ourselves as we go? Is this worth it? . . .and. . .Why? What are these feelings that it is not worth it? Or the feelings that it is worthwhile? Can I process these thoughts personally or is it helpful to share them with a trusted friend? We all need to be heard and taken seriously for the stuff that is mulling around in our heads and hearts.

Is it worth it to love? Is it worth it to listen? Is it worth it to take the time to be heard and valued? Is it worth it to struggle to make room for another? To be a mentor to another? Why do we do what we do? Why do we sacrifice?

These seem to be good questions to be considered in prayer, in stillness, in the noisy quiet of reflection. Silent prayer is anything but relaxing if we listen to what is bubbling around in our soul. And yet, how valuable to plow into, to sow these seeds of contemplation! What is the value of living? What is the value of spiritual discipline? What is the value of sensing Spirit within us, between us, around us, that we may give and receive truly!

Ephesians has something to say about this, I believe, in its grand cosmic prelude. According to the writer, we are blessed in Christ with a profound blessing which has nothing to do with stuff. We are chosen in Christ at the beginning in love. Holy and blameless in love. This holy and blameless in love, is it about us doing and being, or is it more a reality which we live into—the Christ Spirit of love. God beyond *us*, present in the universe, at work for good and peace and life without any effort on our part.

In the church, baptism's cleansing water is a celebration of being united with Christ's Spirit. Communion's bread of life and cup of salvation is a further celebration of the Spirit of Christ at work since the foundation of the world.

Sometimes these practices are celebrated narrowly in the church, but Ephesians, Amos, and John the Baptizer remind us that the life we celebrate is a unifying blessing, a call to simple repentance and worship rather than a doctrine which divides.

Amos gives up his sense of belonging, John releases his life over to this powerful, undeniable, undefeatable force of life at work in the world.

This life, this love, I believe, is what ultimately allows us to say. . . “It was worth it all, the cost, sacrifice, the length or brevity of our lives—it is worth it because we have given ourselves over to the struggle of love and life around us as we are able. We have given ourselves over to this Spirit which is ever-present without fail, without disappointment. Where will love leads us? Regardless, it will be a good place and way to live. Amen.