

# “In a world where nurses make millions and NBA stars earn a fair living wage”

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## Reflection for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2020

### St. Paul's, Hamilton

Perhaps Covid 19 will change our system of values forever, and soon we will be reading headlines like this:

“Nurses at the General Hospital agree to a four-year \$12,000,000 contract with a \$1,000,000 signing bonus.”

“Cashiers at local Freshco sign new deal for \$1,000,000 per year with option for performance bonuses.”

“NBA stars demand minimum wage.”

It probably won't happen; however, in a time of crisis, we have realized the true worth of so many people. I like to think that we will carry this wisdom into the future, but we will likely go back to a system where sports stars earn more than some small nations while nurses and truck drivers struggle to survive. It's not the fault of the athletes. In 1925 the Chicago Bears, in the newly formed NFL, signed popular university athlete Harold “Red” Grange. In one week, their average game attendance went from 10,000 to 70,000 fans per game. They were willing to pay Red Grange anything because his potential to make money for the club was so great. It became clear that average people place high value on someone who is stronger, faster or more beautiful.

We live in a world where the weak, sick and broken are pushed aside, and the strong, healthy and beautiful are lifted up and praised. Jesus lived in a world that was similar. They didn't have the NBA, the NFL or, God help us, the Kardashians, but they knew how to categorize people in accordance with their perceived worth.

The people in Jesus' community lived under Roman occupation, and the Roman's had perfected the art of glorifying the strong and crushing the weak. Roman society had many

levels, but in general, from the top down, were the patricians, the plebeians and the slaves. It was wrong and corrupt. The church in Jesus' society adopted a similar system of assigning worth, with church leaders at the top, a middle class of merchants and workers, and at the very bottom were the sick; those who were blind, lame, suffering from leprosy, or who were in any way deformed. Their corrupted system of assigning various levels of value was backed up by a theology which stated that wealth, strength and health were the sign of God's blessing for the righteous, and that poverty, weakness and illness were a sign of God's punishment for the unrighteousness.

Jesus and his followers challenged the worldly criterion for assigning value to people. Jesus valued and loved the weak as much as the strong, the poor as much as the rich, the sick as much as the healthy. To Rome, and to the church of his day, it was an abomination, it was turning around everything in which they believed. In Acts 17:6 a mob looking for Paul and Silas in Thessalonica cried out in rage, "These people are turning the world upside-down."

The followers of Jesus must continue to turn the world upside-down today. In the midst of a pandemic we have learned the true value of front-line workers, first responders, and all people whose labours we now see are essential. We may never get to the point where truck drivers earn as much as reality TV stars, but we can strive towards a world where all people are given dignity, respect and worth, and all people are regarded as equal even if their labours cannot be monetized like those of an NBA star.

There is a deeper level at which Jesus' followers must challenge the values of the world. So many people have told me that when they became sick, or lost a loved one, or became poor they felt devalued. We tend to praise people who are successful, strong and wealthy. At some deep and primal level, we still carry the ancient superstitious belief that success, strength and wealth are the sign that we are doing things right. Even churches think in those terms. The prosperity gospel is the opposite of the true Gospel. When we face a pandemic, we are distressed, because it devalues us, based on our belief that strength and health are a sign that we are righteous. We, the followers of Jesus, must change that belief. We must let the world know that those who are weak, poor, sick and grieving are worth as much as the strong, wealthy and healthy. We must stop promoting the worldly understanding of human worth, and

begin to promote Jesus' understanding of the worth, dignity, eternal value and equality of all people.

We can set the world the right way up by helping to create social systems in which front-line medical workers, first responders, business owners and essential workers are regarded for their true value to human society. Right now, many of those people feel devalued, and part of our mission is to let them know how greatly valued they are.

We can set the world the right way up by expressing our love and compassion for all the people whose lives have been disrupted or diminished by the pandemic, or whose livelihood has been threatened by the pandemic. Right now, many of those people feel devalued, and part of our mission is to let them know how greatly valued they are.

We can set the world the right way up by allowing our hearts to be broken for the grief and pain of those who have lost loved ones in a senseless rampage in Portapique, Nova Scotia. Those people may feel greatly devalued, and if anything can help their souls it is an outpouring of compassion, love and genuine concern.

There is so much that we can do. We can change the world. We can transform the community around us. And we do this by knowing that Jesus went to all the people who had been devalued and he embraced and loved them, he included and restored them, he redeemed them from the corrupted and backwards value systems of the world.

Jesus and his followers challenged and changed the Roman Empire. They challenged and changed the church. They challenged and changed the tendency of humanity to value the strong over the weak. But that challenge is eternal. That challenge needs you and all your energy today.

Jesus knows the true worth of all people. Jesus knows that all people are equal and have eternal value. And it is in living that Good News that we will help to create a world that, at least to some degree, resembles the Kingdom of God. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.