

## ***Rubbish***

Philippians 3:4b-14

Sermon by Dan Schrock

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Lent 5

<sup>4b</sup>*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*

<sup>7</sup>*Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup>More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup>Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*

### Prelude

*Enter the sanctuary from the back with a large garbage can and set it on the platform beside the pulpit. Already have placed in the pulpit copies of the 3 books.*

### I

During Lent we've been playing with the theme of honor and shame in various biblical passages. Our purpose has been to explore how God honors us, especially through the person of Christ; and how we in turn give honor to God.

The text in front of us this morning is an eye-popping passage. Paul plays with honor and shame in dramatic ways. First, he lists all of his claims to honor. It's really a kind of résumé where Paul brags about all the wonderful things he's done in his life. I was circumcised when I was 8 days old, he says, at exactly the time good Jewish boys should be circumcised. I belong to the people of Israel, to God's own chosen, holy, and beloved people. Even among those chosen, I have special status, because I was born in the elite tribe of Benjamin, descended from the youngest son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews, an elite

among the elite. Moreover, I kept the Jewish law perfectly, down to the last detail, just like the Pharisees do. I was so zealous for God, so zealous for God's law, that I even persecuted the church because I thought it was a heretical Jewish sect. All these things gave me a huge amount of honor in the eyes of my fellow Jews, says Paul. I could hold my head high with the best of them.

But it's all crap, continues Paul. Yes, "crap." The Greek word in verse 8 is *skybala*, a Greek word for excrement. This word was not polite. It bordered on being a cuss word that you might use in a barnyard. All of my honorable accomplishments are crap. They have no ultimate meaning.

Why? Because of Jesus Christ.

In comparison to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord, every honor I've ever received is garbage.

In comparison to being found in Jesus Christ, everything listed on my résumé is rubbish.

In comparison to Christ and his resurrection, all my wonderful accomplishments are trash.

## II

What about you? Do you feel that way about Christ? Think about your own résumé. What on that résumé is worth more to you than knowing Christ?

Is anything on that résumé worth even one-tenth as much to you as knowing Christ? Think about it.

## III

Meanwhile, as you think about it, I want to make this personal.

In modern North American society, a standard practice is to list on your résumé things you've published. Publishing something is seen as honorable. Some people like to brag about what they've published.

#### IV

I have here a newsletter on Christian spirituality I used to publish. It was called *Eidon*, and for several years I wrote an issue every two months.

*Rip and throw in the trash can.*

Here are two articles for *The Mennonite*. One appeared in February 2008 and was called "When You Can't Pray." The other appeared in February 2010 and was entitled "Suffering in the Dark Night." I regard both of them as insignificant in comparison to Christ.

*Rip and throw in the trash can.*

A short meditation that appeared in a book called *Setting the Agenda: Meditations for the Organization's Soul*, from 2011. A grain of sand compared to the gold of Christ.

*Rip and throw in the trash can.*

An essay from a book on youth ministry in the Mennonite church. Published in 2011, the essay was called, "Discovering the Blessings of God's 'Absence': Youth in the Dark Night." Measured against the value of Christ? Worthless.

*Rip and throw in the trash can.*

A review of Angela Reed's book, *Quest for Spiritual Community: Reclaiming Spiritual Guidance for Contemporary Congregations*. This book was adapted from

the Ph.D. dissertation she wrote at Princeton. My review of it was printed in *The Christian Century* on December 27, 2011. But my review means nothing in the brilliant light of Christ.

*Rip and throw in the trash can.*

The first book I published, called *Prayer Practices for Terrifically Busy People*. It's garbage.

*Rip and throw in the trash can.*

A book called *The Dark Night: A Gift of God*. Trash.

*Rip and throw in the trash can.*

Last and most recent of all, a co-edited book from 4 months ago, called *An Open Place: The Ministry of Group Spiritual Direction*. Compared to the value of Jesus Christ, it's crap.

*Rip and throw in the trash can.*

V

What about you?

Compared to the accomplishments of your life, how important to you is Jesus Christ? In order to be found in Christ, what are you willing to drop? Really and truly: how valuable is Jesus Christ to you?