Counting the Cost  
Philippians 3:4b-14 (focus 8-14)  
GMP

When you read these words of St. Paul in our Epistle lesson about loss and gain we tend to think in economic terms and how we come out in the end. Now our context tells us that’s not the case but still in our own sinful hearts we do the math if you will to work out our salvation. Truth is the word Paul uses for gain is better understood in the sense of winning a race. And when he speaks of loss, he’s using a word that carries with it the idea of suffering violence. Clearly, Paul is not talking about economics but a willingness to suffer things that are hazardous to his health and well-being and that all for the sake of Christ.

But still we do all too often show what has top-billing in our hearts by how we use our money. If a problem arises in life, even within the life of the church, we tend to either throw some money at it or complain about not having enough money to throw at it.

But, like I said, this isn’t a lesson about economics, this is a lesson about you. So, I’ll ask the obvious question: What are you willing to lose? What do you count as loss for the sake of knowing Christ as your Savior?” … See how easy it is for the Word of Gospel that Paul speaks here to be turned, with the holiest of intentions, into Law. That is into something that you must do, something that can only condemn you.

See how quickly these words of loss and gain are translated into synergistic terms; that is – you were no doubt already thinking about what you could or perhaps already have given up for your salvation, as though you’ve done some noble deed for God. My friends always keep in mind the words of Luke 17:14  
So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.”

Honestly, I cringe when I hear questions like: What are you willing to surrender and suffer for the sake of Jesus? Beside the fact that questions like that are not faithful to this text or the doctrines of grace and justification, in general, still I would caution you to be very careful before you answer such questions because your words and actions will betray your good intentions. We may not like to admit it; we may not even be aware of it, but there is a huge disconnect between what we’d like to believe is our reality and what our reality really is. And when I say reality I mean from God’s perspective.

Certainly, we’d all like to think of ourselves as those who would be willing to suffer the same fate as those modern-day Christian martyrs, who’ve literally been be-headed by instruments of satan for refusing to renounce their faith in Christ. And while none of us wants to be martyred, still we’d all like to believe that we also would kneel down and let our blood be spilt for the name of Christ.

But what I see in our culture is that most aren’t willing to give up a few hours’ sleep for their faith. Not many will choose losing even a Facebook friend over something as “subjective” as their faith or the doctrines of the church. Many are afraid to speak the clear truths of Scripture because well, offending someone is the greater sin. Honestly, more often than not it seems to me what we’re willing to lose is the truth.

The thing is - our text is not about what you should be willing to lose for the sake of Christ. To be sure it is often taught that way turning it into nothing more than a sales pitch to getting people to surrender “all” to up-grade their seat at the heavenly banquet. Many Christians today are brow-beaten and shamed into thinking that they haven’t given up enough to gain the heavenly prize, and the result of that is, satan rejoices!

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Believe it or not this lesson isn’t about you. It’s not a prescription for better Christian living but a description of what Christ has already given up for you! This is about all that our heavenly Father gave up to gain your salvation! Our God completely forsook or gave up His only-begotten Son to pay for your sin so that life eternal could be freely offered to you and to all. That’s reality! Remember you weren’t just lost—you were a spiritually dead and condemned creature.
Jesus humbled Himself and suffered the greatest loss for your eternal gain. Your sins, even the so called “little ones” that many don’t even think of as sin because “everyone does that,” like say not honoring but taking your father and mother for granted, that one sin alone is so great before God that only the blood of Christ could take it.

It’s as we grow in our understanding of ourselves and God’s mercy that the words of St. Paul begin to make sense to our ears. That’s why I love Paul’s statement: … that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. You see “… by any means possible is not Paul’s way of saying that he’ll do whatever it takes to get to heaven.

When Paul says: “by any means possible” he actually is making a very profound statement of humble faith and trust in His eternal God and Father. When, whatever this life has to offer is looked at through the lens of the cross he understands how useless it really is, that it’s rubbish, literally dung.

That means that whatever may befall us in this life is truly not worth comparing to what is already ours in Christ. For Paul … by any means possible is another way of saying, “I’m okay with whatever God has in store for me because I know that God is working all things for the good of His church. And if that means that Paul has to suffer before God brings him home, then so be it.

That’s what “trust in God above all things” looks and sounds like in real life. It’s absolutely beautiful, and it’s not something that can be commanded or coerced or taught. This “sanctified trust” is a blessed fruit of faith in Christ alone.

Here is Christ Jesus…for you! Here is the One who lost everything for you that you by grace thorough faith might gain everything from Him. The Gospel reality of “Christ crucified for you” is the life-giving seed we sow, the seed that by Gods’ grace and nurturing takes root in your heart and springs up to bear the fruit of faith.

A faith so real that even when you doubt in your sinful mind God’s gift of faith in our heart firmly trust in Him in good times and in bad times, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, until finally death separates us from this veil of tears and face to face we are reunited with our eternal groom in His heavenly Kingdom.

But until that day forgetting what is behind we press forward in faith. Will we ever run this race of life in the faith perfectly? No, we can all honestly own the words of our lesson: Not that I’ve already obtained this or am already perfect … but that’s not the point, as you know Christ has already paid for all sins. We run not counting the cost because with Paul Christ Jesus has made us His own.

In His Holy Name, Amen.