

32963 article, 3-19-10

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Assessing Your Life

How do you assess your life's contribution? If applause and appreciation from the world are the measures, there are bound to be disappointments. Are there other measures of a life's contribution, besides public approval?

In thinking through that question recently, we were reminded of a book entitled, *Theodore Rex*, a biography of Teddy Roosevelt. It clearly elucidated the controversies, criticisms, and conflicts that Roosevelt faced a hundred years ago. Yet Roosevelt's biographers noted that despite the sometimes severe criticism Roosevelt faced, he stood amazingly firm in the face of it and seemed virtually impervious to whatever harsh commentary was thrown his way.

His own life philosophy, and a clue into his ability to handle the intense criticism he sometimes faced, is found in a speech he gave at Sorbonne University in 1918. Here are his words: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Roosevelt's words ring like a challenge across the years, don't they? He clearly believed that the measure of a life does not lie in its achievements, but its efforts; not in its successes, but its struggles toward some worthy purpose. Would you agree? Have you been, in Roosevelt's words, a "cold and timid soul" -- unwilling to push hard, dare much, care deeply? Or have you given your all for the purposes of your life? And if you have, what are the worthy purposes toward which you struggle?

We've always found Jesus' parable of the "Pearl of Great Price" particularly meaningful to us, as we prioritize how to spend our time and

energy. Jesus reminds his hearers that a merchant, who recognized a pearl of great value, would sell everything else he owned to buy it.

The parable challenges us to become astute in recognizing the relative worth of things – and then to pursue the most valuable. For Jesus the most valuable thing to pursue was the Kingdom of Heaven – God’s own Realm.

What about you? What do count as most valuable in life? And are you pursuing it with all your heart and soul? If you are, then we hope you will not be deceived into believing that the measure of your life lies in the world’s applause and approval; but that you will, instead, find your satisfaction in pursuing that “Pearl.”