

## Sermon 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (19<sup>th</sup> August, 2018) Jim Lam

1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

I was a teenager when I first came across the expression “something to die for”. Thinking that it must be something to do with martyrs, I checked the dictionary. It read, “informal; extremely good or highly desirable” ...so, it must be about some great and heroic causes. Then I reached the bit that showed how to use the expression in a sentence, it went, “I would die for a Coca-Cola”! (The person who compiled the dictionary must be mighty thirsty!)

In the mundaneness of daily life, are there things that are really worth dying for? Or at least, are there some values that we should persevere to guard, some goals that we would strive to achieve, even if it means great sacrifices? What is it that determines our values?

A few years back, I was holidaying with my family in Tokyo. Most of the people we met were rather skinny, until we saw a mountain of flesh moving along in the crowd. Yes, that was a sumo wrestler. Sumo wrestlers enjoy high social status. They are idols for many young girls in Japan. And because there is no classification of levels by body weight in this traditional Japanese sport, the heavier the competitor the better their chances of winning, by shoving their opponent out of the ring. And winning means money and prestige. Therefore, maintaining a tremendous weight becomes a very important goal for sumo wrestlers, even though their health will suffer in the long run.

Statistics show that their average life expectancy is only 57 years, compared to an average 81 years among Japanese men. In spite of this there are still many who dream of the glamour and the glory which sumo wrestling brings.

Early last month, a rescue mission in Thailand captured the attention and the hearts of the world. Twelve young soccer players and their coach were trapped in a flooded cave for more than 10 days in what was originally meant to be a half-day exploration. More than 1,000 people from several countries joined in the race against time to achieve what was seemingly impossible. The death of an experienced diver underlined the high risks in the treacherous under water escape route. On 10<sup>th</sup> July, the editorial in *The Guardian* had this to say: “what made this story so powerful and absorbing was seeing humanity at its best: this is a tale of innocence protected; of perseverance against the odds and heroism in the face of danger; above all, of triumph over despair.”

So, what is the most valuable in life? For the sumo wrestlers, it's glamour and money. For those in the heroic rescue in Thailand, it's the pricelessness of life itself. And what about us? Our answers may be very different. If we come into a large fortune, what would we spend it on? A luxury home? A Lamborghini? A round-the-world holiday? What is the most valuable “thing” that we can acquire? If we care to face it, we might discover that the most valuable that we can have in life is not something we can buy or earn. The most valuable is life itself. And life is made up of time. And time is at once the most valuable and most perishable of all our possessions.

That is why Saint Paul tells us in the Ephesians to make the most of the time. He writes, “be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.” Is the apostle simply teaching us to be better managers of our time, just like the way we try to convince our children to make wiser use of their time? Yes, and more. We are not only warned against a sinful and unprofitable waste of time “because the days are evil”, but we are encouraged to use it for greater and more important purposes, like, maintaining a better bond with our family, doing good to others, and building a closer relationship with God and neighbour. We are reminded to be sensible about the way we live, and live as wise people.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is the capability to judge and to recognise what is valuable, as we can see from King Solomon’s choice. When God promised him a gift, King Solomon asked for wisdom. He wanted the abilities to understand and to discern, so that he could govern his people. Wisdom is to be clearheaded about our values when we make decisions and not just follow the crowd. Like Solomon, we must pray for wisdom, so that we can discern what is truly valuable for us.

In our reading from John this morning, Jesus says, “I am the living bread” and continues with an invitation to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Eating and drinking is essential if we want to stay alive and healthy. This is also the case with our spiritual life. Jesus is the living bread necessary for a life firmly rooted right at the source of life, our Creator God, the Living Father. This is the only true and complete life. Moreover, this life is real in the here and now, not something yet to happen. Jesus’ “live

forever” promise does not only mean life after death, but also life from now on. This living bread is given now for you and me, so that we can be fed and live, so that we can know that he is in us and us in him.

One marked feature of this kind of life is gratitude. Paul strongly encourages an attitude of gratitude. To the Ephesian Christians he writes: ‘Give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’. Moreover, a life rooted in gratitude to God means that we learn to see things from God’s perspective. Quite often, we tend to look at things that happen around us from a human point of view. And when similar happenings take place again and again, be it negligence of the needy, bullying at schools, or social injustice, our feelings towards those affected would somehow grow more and more numbed. Yet if we learn to see things from God’s perspective, we would be able to understand and discern with mercy and with love.

Each time we gather around the Lord’s table, may we remember and give thanks not only for Jesus’ death and resurrection, but also for his life and his teachings, and savour once again the love and blessings which he has bestowed on us.

Through eating the bread and drinking the cup, may our lives be nourished, so that we can live a life that is truly worth living. Amen.