

What's In The Bag?

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18 NRSV

An old story comes to us from Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire. In that conquest Alexander's soldiers overran the palace of Darius the king. Looking for things to steal, one soldier came upon a leather bag containing the crown jewels of Persia. The stones were worth millions. However, the ignorant soldier dumped them on a rubbish heap, saving only the leather bag. He ran around the camp telling the other men about the marvelous bag he'd found to carry his food.

How often in life we throw away jewels and keep only the leather bag. We do it when we embrace pleasures at the sacrifice of our bodies, when we sacrifice our marriages to satisfy lust, when we ignore our children in the search for material security, when we sacrifice our souls in our love affair with the world. The great tragedies of life can be summed up like this: We threw away jewels and kept only the brown leather bag that they came in.

So it is with religion. We make such a to-do about the trappings of religion and ignore that which is vital. Paul made no such mistake. He knew what was central, essential, and irreplaceable - it was the cross of Jesus Christ and all that cross signifies.

Prayer: Loving God, every time I see the cross of Jesus Christ, may I be reminded of your gift of forgiveness, given out of love. Amen.