

The Shopper

My friend Marlene LOVES to shop! Most of the time she enjoys checking out the season's offerings in styles and colors, but she also has a real eye for a bargain. When she finds something that could become a "real find" (when the red-tag sales come), she checks it out regularly so that on the "Big Sale" day, she can pop into a given store, snatch up her treasure at nothing less than a true bargain price. Marlene is good at this! So was her sister Marilyn.

I recently conducted the homegoing celebration when Marilyn died. I didn't know much about her walk with the Lord; actually not too many did. But as the family gathered, I learned once again how much Marilyn enjoyed shopping for bargains. The other thing I discovered was that there was woven throughout her very quiet and unassuming life a thread – a thread of faith and hope.

She had been graced with a grandmother into whose fabric of life was also sewn a red string of faith. Though Marilyn's folks didn't attend church regularly, Grandma Elliott, did. Now mind you, Grandma didn't drive. But she made it plainly known to her daughter that she expected to be picked up for church every Sunday. Further, she expected to have her two grand-daughters, Marilyn and Marlene dressed and in the car so she could take them to church with her.

For years Marilyn and Marlene were taken to a Baptist church by Grandma. Sunday after Sunday, faithful Sunday School teachers planted seeds of faith. They watered those seeds, they hoed around them. These teachers had a strong faith in Jesus Christ, and they used every opportunity to plant faith seeds in their little students. Besides Sunday School, the girls were fed Divine Food, the very Word of God at the church service.

Time passed. Marilyn grew up and graduated from high school and business college. The seeds of faith that had been sown in her sprouted. At the young age of about 13 she surrendered her life and her soul's welfare into the hands of Jesus.

In time she married and had a son. But after awhile she stopped attending church, for reasons no one will ever know.

Marlene, meanwhile, has long prayed for Marilyn, not being certain about her relationship with the Lord. As it became evident that her life on earth was nearly completed, the burden of prayer she had for her sister was heavy. Two nights before Marilyn died, Marlene was interceding for her as usual, unaware that her time on earth was shorter than 48 hours. The Lord spoke to her heart that Marilyn was His, and that

He was coming Himself to escort her to His home in heaven. The peace in Marlene's countenance assured me she had indeed heard from the Lord.

It was only after we got together with the extended family that a picture began to form of Marilyn's faith life. As family members chatted and remembered loving snippets about her life, it was mentioned that for some time she had taken her little boy to church every Sunday. Then a couple of nieces mentioned how Marilyn used to attend their church as a young adult and taught them in Sunday School. This had gone on for some time, unnoticed and unknown by other members of her family.

Marilyn's love for hidden treasures (real bargains) in clothing stores was simply legendary. A couple of times a year, she and Marlene and their mother would head to the big city of Indianapolis to shop. Not only did they take their purses with money in them, they took changes of shoes for the inevitable hour when the pain in their feet demanded a change of shoes so they could continue shopping for their "treasures." When they came home and showed their "finds," sure enough, many were indeed bargains. All of a sudden I knew the Lord had given me the message for her homegoing celebration.

Marilyn's love for finding treasures was a shadow of the Lord's love for her, for me and for you. One time when Jesus was trying to explain to folks what His Kingdom was all about, when He was really trying to share what His Father treasured most, He said this:

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it! Matthew 13:45-46 NIV

Like a merchant – like a buyer – That's how our Lord is. A God whose drive is to find real pearls, real gems. A God sorting through multitudes of objects for sale, looking for just that one that would catch His eye. And when He did find it, the surprise is that it wasn't on sale at all!

In fact, this treasure He really wanted was so expensive that if He sold everything He had, He still couldn't afford it. The only price that could be paid in order to gain this treasure for Himself was for Him to surrender, to give up His own life! His life in order to redeem or buy the treasure He so desired to have for Himself!

Jesus spoke yet again about His heart for hidden treasures when He said

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field – and to get the treasure, too! Matthew 13:44 NIV

My dear friend, **YOU are that pearl of great price! YOU are that treasure!** So was Marilyn! Her joy at finding a bargain at L.S. Ayres was but a dim, dim shadow of the Lord's joy at "finding" her and purchasing her, at "finding" YOU and purchasing you. But there is one major difference.

You and I were dirty, we were lost, we were without real hope. We were not lovely to look at or behold. Were most of us to have a price-tag on us outside of Christ, it would be a real "blue-light special!" That is, until He cast His eyes upon us.

When He saw you and me, He found the desire of His heart! He decided before the foundation of the earth that He wanted you and me as His own. He knew what our sinful choices would do to us, would cause us to become. But His mind was made up; So He came and found His treasure. He found His pearl of great price. It was and is – Marilyn! You! Me!

My precious friend, I encourage you to go to the store and buy yourself a sermon. Buy yourself a little fake pearl. Keep that pearl somewhere really close to you. Keep it out in the open where you'll see it every day. The next time you are tempted to think poorly of yourself, the next time you feel all alone, or unappreciated or unloved, I want you to pick up that pearl and take a look at it – and then talk to the Lord about what He thinks of you. You will end up thanking Him for purchasing you at such great personal cost to Him.

Listen to what Jesus said about you and me:

"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep." John 10:14-15 NAS

and just a couple more thoughts from the Word:

"Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Acts 20:28

“And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Rev 5:9

Oh be glad that you are Someone’s Treasure. You’ve been bought! You’ve been paid for! You’ve been cleaned up and polished up! You’ve been forgiven! You have a reason to live, and you have a reason to die! You are your Beloved’s, and He really truly is yours! Oh sing with me the Song of the Bride!

