

11th June 2020

Value

**“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?
And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will.
But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.
Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”**

Bible, Matthew 10:29-31

What is the value of a life? The name of George Floyd, who died so tragically in police custody in Minneapolis, is now known throughout the world. We have seen anti-racism protests and marches, statements of solidarity from businesses and celebrities, condemnation of racism and discrimination from leaders across the spectrum of political opinion. In death, George Floyd has become widely known. Perhaps more than in life, this man has become someone of value.

William Ferris died in a seedy lodging-house in my city-centre parish in the 1980s and I may be the only person who remembers his name. It was a Local Authority funeral, for he had no known relatives, and no one knew a thing about him. The day before I was to conduct his funeral, I went to the lodging house to be met by a huge, gorilla of a man, who wasn't best pleased being disturbed. I told him why I was there, and asked him if he could help me with information. The big man scratched his head, before he gave me a whole life story: "We ca'ed him Wee Wullie. He kept himsel' tae himsel'. Aye, an' he liked his pint."

The following day, by an unmarked grave in a city cemetery, with two grave-diggers, a Funeral Director and a hearse driver (gorilla-man from the lodging house never appeared) I paid tribute to the entirety of a life: "He was known as Willie. He was a small and quiet man. And he liked his pint. Thank you, God, for the value of the life of this man."

What is the value of a life? The value of George Floyd's life is that he may have sparked off a world-wide movement of justice and hope. The value of the life of Willie Ferris is that, in death, he changed me forever and taught me to see worth in every person. Today I am privileged to be the one who gives thanks for the life and value of William Ferris.

A prayer for today

Lord, you value every life, more than many sparrows. Help us to do likewise. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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