

Lent 1

There are so many people I know, who suffer from lack of self esteem. They don't initiate friendships with anyone because they believe no one would really want to be their friend. They fear their efforts to reach out will be rejected. They wake up wondering what is going to go wrong today. They respond to everything in their day through the filter of 'I'm not good enough'.

It is ridiculous. It is completely irrational. They are so talented in so many ways. They are so likeable. But they go around all day with this imaginary dark cloud over their heads, knowing that others deserve to get the job, someone else deserves to get a good diagnosis, to be invited to the party, etc.. They are convinced that they do not deserve anything good. Unworthy!

Do you know anyone like that?

Do you ever feel like that?

Even if a feeling is irrational, it is powerful. Even if we know in theory it is not true, it can still be paralyzing. How we feel, impacts everything we say and every decision we make. Feeling unworthy, and not good enough, impacts what we say and do in a very specific way.

We don't use the word a great deal these days, but everyone is so aware of their own sin. Everyone is so aware of their imperfection. Everyone is so aware of their lack of achievement and their moments of failure. So how in the world can we expect those people to accept the fact – the reality – the truth – that they are loved – that they are in fact worthy- that they are a child of God, dearly loved, always forgiven.

If I asked you right now, to get up and move to this side of the church if you, in your head and in your heart, believe that you are loved, that you are worthy, and that you are a child of God, dearly loved and always forgiven, would you move? I hope that you really believe that? I hope that you claim God's love for you? Just as you are....imperfections and all.....you are worthy, you are a child of God, you are loved!

There are so many reasons why we feel badly about ourselves. Getting through life is not possible without leaving a scar or two. If your heart, or your self image, or your self esteem has not been hurt at some point along the way, you have not lived.

Call it faith, or religion, or theology, whatever you want, but an essential ingredient is about believing. Believing – a pretty common, understandable word. To believe. You use that word often I assume. You believe it is safe to cross the street. You believe you can cook a nice dinner, or walk a mile, or help someone out. It is about theoretical knowledge that you are convinced is true.

Imagine someone you know well, not a family member, and one day they tell you, that they really like you and they enjoy spending time with you. Do you believe them? Or in the back of your mind do you say, why would they want to be my friend, or well, that's nice to hear, but if they really knew me....or if they knew my secrets....or if they had seen me in that situation.....

Given all the public and private parts of you, the beauty spots and the warts of your life, the successes and the failures, the things you are proud of and the things you want to keep hidden, do you believe that you are likeable? Do you

even dare to believe that you are loveable? Do you still, in spite of all of this, believe that God loves you?

Consider this list from the Bible –

(Slide #1)

Adam and Eve

Jonah

Moses

Peter

Judas

Thomas

Paul

What do these people have in common?

For me, it is a list of people who used to disgust me. It used to be a list of people who made me so angry, and hurt, and disappointed. I had no time or use for any of them!

Adam and Eve - Eve tempted Adam to do something they both had been specifically told NOT to do. But they intentionally, deliberately disobeyed the only request that God made of them....after all He had created for them....after all the love he had poured out on them.....just this one thing. No!

Jonah - God kept asking Jonah to go and speak to some people on his behalf. Jonah kept saying no and kept trying to run away. He did not want to do what God was clearly asking of him.

Moses - Excuse making Moses. No Lord I can't lead your people. I'm not a good leader. I can't speak to a crowd. I am not a good speaker. Ask my brother, or anyone else, not me Lord...I would love to say yes to you but I just can't.

Peter- Lord you know I love you. I would do anything for you. Lord I would die for you. I want to be at your side forever. "No, I have no idea who this Jesus is....never met him."

Judas.....do we need to even say anything here?

Thomas - doubting Thomas.....I am not going to believe, until I see the wounds in his side and the nail holes in his hands and feet. Seeing is believing!

Paul – the zealot. He could not kill enough Christians fast enough!

There are at least a couple of perspectives on this list I have created.

We can look at their humanity, their frailty, their SIN, and we can become very arrogant and condescending. Look at those sinners! I am so glad I am not like them!

Or we can say, well, they let their imperfection show, and it seems that God continued to love them and forgive them and bless them. Maybe there is a chance God will continue to love me and forgive me and bless me, even in my own imperfection, even when I have given in to temptation.

And there are likely a number of other perspectives worth considering.

Adam and Eve -The serpent tempted Eve. Eve tempted Adam. Adam chose to give in to temptation and disobey God.

Jonah and Moses did not have the courage required to do what God was asking of them. Both refused. Initially the temptation to play it safe won out. But in the end, both obeyed.

Peter feared for his own life. He lied to save himself. He was tempted by playing it safe. He was not willing to die for Christ.

Judas.....I am not sure why Judas lost his allegiance to Jesus, but the temptation to get all that money, simply by telling the enemies where Jesus was, seemed too good to be true and it would be stupid to pass up.

Thomas – it wasn't so much as falling to temptation with Thomas, it was that word believe. We talk about faith as believing without seeing. What was the strength or depth of Thomas' faith that he had to see in order to believe.

And finally Paul - Anything Paul did, he did full out....100%!! So influenced by his education, his culture, his environment, he believed the best world was a world with no Christians in it. And then God touched his life, in a powerful and permanent way! He went on to change the world for the Christ he so vehemently had fought to extinguish!

As we begin this journey through Lent, there are some words that I hope you will write down somewhere and consider from time to time.

Faith Belief Forgiveness Temptation Obedience

Consider what it means for you to have faith.

Consider what it means for you to believe.

Consider what it means for you to forgive and to be forgiven

Consider what might be tempting you.

Consider what it means for you to be obedient to God.

Are you worth God's love?

Even though you may not be perfect, does God love you?

Are you willing to accept forgiveness?

God bless you on the journey

Amen