

“You’re Nobody’s Fool -- Except God’s.”
1 Corinthians 1: 26-29

A kindergarten teacher wrote a song about popcorn. Then she had her class crouch down on the floor as they sang it. At the appropriate point in the song, all the children would "pop up." The teacher had them "popping" all over the classroom.

One day, during the popcorn song, the teacher noticed that one little boy remained crouched down when all the other children popped up. "What's wrong?" the teacher asked. "Why can't you `pop' like the other children?" The little boy replied, "I'm burning on the bottom of the pan."

Some of us are like that little boy. We feel like we are burning on the bottom of the pan. We feel like we have no worth as persons.

In fact surveys show that two out of three of us have a low opinion of ourselves. Psychologists call that low self-esteem. They have known for years that low self-esteem is often the root of many of our psychological and social ills. People with high self-esteem are healthier than those with low self-esteem. They live longer and have fewer accidents.

People with high self-esteem tend to get better paying jobs, and are more successful once they get a job. Why? Studies show it is because they expect to be successful. Martin Seligman, a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, surveyed representatives of a major life insurance company. He found that those who expected to succeed sold 37% more insurance than those who did not. A person who sees himself or herself as a failure will generally fulfill that prophecy.

GOD SEES US AS PERSONS OF INFINITE WORTH, AND THAT IS THE WAY WE NEED TO SEE OURSELVES. LET’S BEGIN HERE.

We need to remember that “God so loved the world,” that He sent His one and only Son into the world.

I want each of you here tonight to understand something: In God’s eyes, you are a VIP -- a very important person. It may be hard for many of us to think of ourselves that way, but not for God. You are so important to God, that God sent Jesus into this world in order to bring you to God!

But -- there are so many of us who have the “little ole me” syndrome. It’s the person who thinks: *“I couldn’t possibly matter that much. I’m not a celebrity. I didn’t go to Harvard. I don’t own a private jet. I’m just...little ole me.”* There ARE exceptions of course, but most of us are not *prima donnas*; most of us do not have an over-inflated view of ourselves. Rather, most of us could use a little positive reinforcement from time to time. A little encouragement. We probably carry with us a bit of the “little ole me” syndrome.

Here is where there is Good News. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says that God can and does great and mighty things with the “little ole me’s” of this world. He writes:

“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things -- and the things that are not -- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

(verses 26-29)

One of the most common afflictions in our society today is “depression.” Many people carry it around with them like a ball and chain, and it wears and it grinds on them. One of the attendant feelings with depression is that of feeling worthless or unlovable.

I believe that God would hold a mirror before you tonight and say: *“Look at yourself! You are NOT worthless -- YOU are my child! And no child of mine is ever ‘worthless’ or ‘unlovable.’”*

What I’m trying to say to you all tonight, is NOT that you should embrace an egocentric brand of faith -- but rather, for each of you to see yourself as a child of the Living God. To see yourself as a member of God’s Royal Family. To hold your head high and to sing with your heart, despite whatever circumstances you face here on earth!

Know that in God’s eyes, you are of infinite worth! It is important for you to see yourself that way -- not only for your sake -- but also for the sake of how you can have the confidence to serve God with your life.

In one of his books, Robert Schuller tells about a delightful conversation he had with actor Gregory Peck. It concerned how Peck bought

his beautiful home.

Peck was in the middle of filming the life of General Douglas MacArthur. They were working on a deadline and Peck was very busy. He had no idea his wife had decided to go shopping for a home. On that particular morning they were going to film the scene in which MacArthur addressed both houses of Congress.

Six hundred hired extras were on hand to play congressmen and senators who would listen to the "old soldiers never die, they just fade away" speech.

Peck put the finishing touches on his eloquent lines, straightened his full dress uniform, and prepared to shoot the scene. Just then he was called to the phone. It was his wife.

"Honey, you've got to get down here. I've found our dream house," she said excitedly.

He said, "What dream house?"

"The dream house we've been looking for all our lives. You know what I'm talking about. You've got to come down here and see this house. It's on the market and it already has a couple of offers on it, but we've got to have this house. You've got to get down here."

Peck tried to say in a very sweet tone, "Darling, you have to realize that I'm about to shoot a scene. We have six hundred hired extras. The set is prepared. I have to be here all day shooting. I cannot leave."

"But honey," she said, "you've got to come."

"Not really, darling," he answered, "You've got to understand the picture. I am in full-dress uniform and I'm playing General Douglas MacArthur. My hat has all the stars across the front. My lapels shine in the light with all of the fruit salad and medals. I am literally General Douglas MacArthur. I'm too busy to come and look at a house."

"But honey," she insisted, "you've got to see our dream house or we're going to lose it." He could tell his wife was in no mood to be turned down, not even by General Douglas MacArthur. So he finally worked out an hour for lunch and took the studio limo over to the address she had given him.

He strode onto the property in full dress uniform. As far as anybody who really didn't know him could tell, he was General Douglas MacArthur.

"Where's the Realtor?" he said. "Show me the property."

He walked around the estate for six minutes, never looked inside, then said to his wife, "Buy it. I don't care what it costs. Buy it." And then he was gone.

The irony is that Peck declares that he is terrible at making decisions. And yet he made one of the biggest decisions of his life in six minutes. He added, "I have a feeling it had to do with the uniform." He saw himself for a few moments as tough, decisive Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

How we view ourselves makes all the difference in the world. Hockey great Wayne Gretzky was interviewed before the second game of a playoff series. His team had not looked good in losing the first game. He was asked whether his coach had shown the players their mistakes on video. Gretzky said that rather than showing them a video of their mistakes, their coach showed highlights of them performing well. Why reinforce negative images? They needed to see themselves as they could be, not as they had been. By the way, Gretzky's team won the second game and subsequently took the Stanley Cup.

Some of us concentrate on our mistakes, our failures, our blown opportunities. We replay in our minds the time we looked foolish, the word we wish we had not said, the slight that should never have been given. God says, The past is past. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

All that matters is the future. And God delights in taking people who feel terrible about their lives and helping them get hold of themselves and make a bold, new beginning. God delights in that! Don't forget: last week, Eric Voland reminded us of Jesus' parable of the lost sheep, in which Jesus said that there is rejoicing in heaven over the one lost sheep that is found than all the ninety-nine safely in the fold.

Richard B. Wilke had a conversation with Richard Block of The H & R Block Income Tax Service about the success of that organization. Richard Block said, "Every morning when I go to my office, I picture in my mind a

mother of two small children who teaches math in the junior high school. We've trained her as a tax counselor. She opens the door of that little office, sits behind a wooden desk with a wooden chair, planning to make a few extra dollars to supplement her income.

"A pickup truck pulls up. A man gets out wearing cowboy boots...He wears a cotton flannel shirt, and under his arm is an old shoe box full of cancelled checks and W2 forms. He drops that box on the bare desk and says, `Ma'am, I sure hope you can help me.'" Block concludes, "As long as we can remember that math teacher and that fellow in the flannel shirt, there will be a need for H & R Block."

When will we be successful doing the work of Christ in this world? It will be the moment we can visualize individual persons whom we can reach out to with the love of God. We will be doing His work when we offer them encouragement, hope and the belief that they, too, are persons of real value for whom Jesus Christ gave his life. When that happens, God and all the angels will burst out in joyous glee.

You're nobody's fool -- except God's. (And that's a pretty lofty place to be!) Tonight before you go to bed -- and tomorrow morning when you get up -- I would encourage you to do what another good German did each night and morning. (His name was Martin Luther) Make the sign of the cross and say to yourself: "*I belong to God.*"

Amen.

Illustrations borrowed from King Duncan.