

In His Image

Sterling UMC

June 19, 2011

Genesis 1:24-2:3

Transcription of live recording

One of the things that I see most often as I work with people and counsel with people and as I deal with the problems and the difficulties that people face, one of the most pressing problems and issues that I that I see in the life of people is the problem of self-esteem. Many people come to me and through circumstances of life, through things that happen, through interactions and relationships that are broken, through all kinds of life events; their self-esteem has been beaten down. It impacts their sense of value. Their worth as a person has gone down and down and down and that has a very dramatic and drastic impact on many people's lives.

The problem is that many people seem to try to find their value in their work and their self-esteem through the things of this world. They feel like if they have the right job or if their income is high or if they live in a nice house or drive the right car, if their relationship is intact or if people like them and they are accepted by people then their esteem is good. This is fine, but the problem is that all of those things are fleeting and temporary. Jobs can be taken away. Relationships do get broken. Incomes decrease. Our homes and our cars break down and deteriorate, and if we are counting on those things as the ways to give us our sense of self worth and value then we are all in for a mighty disappointment.

So where do we find our ultimate sense of value? Where do we find our sense of worth as a person? Well I believe that that you can go all the way back to the very beginning of the Bible to the end of the story of creation. We see there God's intention for us as human beings. We find, as we heard and as we read those words of the creation story that we are made in the image of God. Each one of us, made in the image of God as we bear the likeness of God himself. On this Father's Day it's so comforting and so amazing to think about the fact that God is our Heavenly Father, and each one of us is His children. In fact, one of the verses that I love you so much and I think it's so appropriate on a day like today is from 1 John 3:1, "How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God." And that is what you and I are; children of God made in the likeness, in the image of God and that that has some very powerful implications for each of our lives. I want to share very briefly just a couple of those things with you this morning.

First of all as a creation of God made in the image of God you and I have a special place in creation. Desiree just a moment ago read just the last part of the creation story. As we go back all the way to the very beginning of that story, it is in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. We go through that story and we see how God creates the land and the water and the sky and the sun and the moon and then that the plants and the vegetation and the birds of the air, the fish of the sea and all of the livestock and then on the last day his crowning achievement. His masterpiece. He creates a human being and out of the side of the man he takes a rib and creates a woman. He created them both male and female. God's crowning achievement is you and me; we're made in his likeness. It means we're above the animals. We were placed here to have dominion over them but also to be stewards of creation around us. God has given us a special responsibility.

Some people treat their animals or pets like people. Do you know that we just got a new puppy at our house and I can assure you that little puppy is like a little baby and it requires almost as much care and love and attention as it is a little baby. Some people dress up their animals. They may feed them people food. But you know what? As wonderful as that is and as much joy and peace and happiness as that brings us they are not people. We have something that animals don't. We have the ability to reason and to make the choice between right and wrong. We have a soul that has been given to us through God. As the creation story unfolds we hear how God breathed into us the breath of life. That word in the Greek is the word from where we get the word wind. The word is pneuma where we get our word pneumatic tool or a hammer or pneumonia. It's about wind and breath.

Last week we celebrated Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit came in the form and the sound of a mighty rushing wind of the Spirit of God filled the people. That's what separates us from all the rest of creation. We have been breathed into us by the Spirit of God and that makes us unique and special.

But being made in the image of God doesn't place us above the animals and also gives us a special place in God's heart because we're all his children. We are unique and he knows us individually.

One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 139. Listen to these words as you think about being known and being a child of God; being created in His image. Beginning in verse 13 it says, "For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." How awesome and amazing. God knew you, He knew me even before my eyes saw the light of day; even before I took my first breath. God knew me and loves me uniquely individually and special. I am a child of God. You are a child of God and that changes everything.

When you look at life in that way, when you look at your value your worth in that way it changes everything. No longer do you have to depend upon the things of this world to find your value and your worth. You're a child of God. God loves you uniquely and individually and special. He's looking out for you every single day and he wants what's best for you.

There's another implication of this. Because we are created in the image of God we are created to seek to be like Him. This doesn't mean we become God. We seek to become like God. Since God is love we are to give and to receive love. Because God is holy, we are to seek to be holy and be righteous as he is righteous. Because God is a God of compassion and service, we as His people made in His image are to be people who love and serve and care for others. That image of God is stamped upon our lives and we have a great responsibility to do those things that would point to the one who is our Creator.

There's a problem with that. We don't often see that as we should, do we? We don't always love as God loves. We don't always walk in holiness and righteousness as God is holy and righteous. We don't often or always show compassion and love to those in need, or serve those who are really hurting. Why? What's the reason? Well, the reason is simple. It is called sin. Sin marred that image of God, that ideal image in which we were created. All the way at the beginning with Adam and Eve we see this. That image has been marred. It's like a mirror that has been a perfect reflection and all of a sudden it's been shattered and now that reflection is destroyed. How do we respond? How do we do we recapture that?

Fortunately, God has made a way. He sent us his only son, Jesus Christ, who came to die in our place so that image might be restored so that when God looks upon us, when we accept and receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, he no longer sees that marred and destroyed image of a fallen human being, but he sees the image of the perfect person, His son, Jesus. You see, Jesus was the perfect expression of the image of God, his life, his ministry, the way he lived. The words that he spoke and the way that he interacted with people show us a perfect picture of who God wants us to become as Christians. That's our goal to become more and more every day conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

You want to know ultimately where your value comes from? Your value comes because you have been created in the image of God and because God desires a relationship with you. Think about it this way. How do you determine the value of an object? Say you want to sell your car or your home. What if you're trying to price all these items that have come in for the rummage sale? The value is determined by the price someone might be willing to pay for that item. There is an old expression that goes, "One man's trash is another man's treasure." Something that may not be of any value or any worth to one person, someone else may see it and they might be willing to pay a lot more. The value of something is determined by the price someone is willing to pay.

You want to know your ultimate value? Think about the price that God was willing to pay. Think about the price that he paid when he sent his only Son to die on the cross. He paid the ultimate price so you and I might be reconciled to him, so that image could be restored and that he could have fellowship with us as he intended originally in the garden. That's where we find our worth. That's where we find our value.

You and I are made in the image of God. That changes the way we look at ourselves, but it should also change the way we look at other people. We're getting ready in just a moment to commission a mission team and others who ultimately going out in mission and next week we'll be doing the same thing as more teams go out. Remembering that we are made in the image of God, means that everybody is made in the image of God, and because of that God doesn't play favorites. He loves you and he loves me just as much as He does any other person outside the walls of this church. It doesn't matter what language you speak. It doesn't matter what ethnicity. It doesn't matter what gender. It doesn't matter

what socioeconomic status you find yourself in. God has stamped his image on all humanity. So as his children as those who seek to follow him, we should be looking at every person that we encounter as a child of God, as one on whose heart God's image has been stamped. That's why we do mission not so we can pat ourselves on the back, and feel good about ourselves, but because God has called us to be brothers and sisters, to be children of God and to nurture and care for creation.

I hope this morning as you have thought about that you will have a newer and a deeper sense of your worth and your value in God's eyes.

I'll never forget the day that my first son was born. It's hard to believe it's over 21 years ago but it seems like it was just yesterday. I can remember as he was born and I held him and looked at him for the first time. I thought to myself, "How can I ever love anyone or anything anymore than I love that child?" And that was true. Then five years later son number two came along and I thought the same thing. The first time I saw him I thought to myself, "How can I love anyone or anything anymore than him?" And then number three came along. I felt the same way. I can't distinguish between the three. I love them all the same. And as I think about that I think about God. Our Heavenly Father who has created each of us in his own image and who loves us just the same. God has the capacity to love every one of us in the same way. He loves you as if you were the only one just as he loves me loves everyone else. Our responsibility as his people is to demonstrate that that's how we find our value; by knowing that we are God's children, by being willing to share that grace that love, that good news to people everywhere who are so desperate to know that they matter.