

Journey to Hope: Self Esteem  
Mark 1:1-11  
March 7, 2010

Is today Palm Sunday? You might be asking yourself that question given our Scripture Lesson and the hymn we just sang (Tell Me the stories of Jesus).

No, this is only the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent! Palm Sunday will be March 28<sup>th</sup>. So why did we hear about Jesus riding into Jerusalem and the palm waving crowd?

I will answer that in a moment, but first I want you to watch a part of a video. Ted and Lee are actors that portray the disciples Peter and Andrew. The segment we will be viewing is titled "Triumphal Entry".

When we read the story of Palm Sunday we do so knowing the rest of the story. Those same folks that were praising Jesus on Sunday were calling for his death on Friday. But what about Jesus and his disciples on that day he rode into Jerusalem? The excitement, the outpouring of praise, it would not have been difficult to get caught up in all of that. As the video suggests, the disciples must have been feeling pretty good about themselves.

When I think of Jesus and the disciples surrounded by the adoring crowd, I recall scenes of the Beatles riding through a mob of fans. With that kind of adulation, how can you not develop an elevated sense of your importance?

Jesus was well aware of what was ahead of him. He stayed humble even when he was being treated like a conquering king. Jesus knew this day was just one leg of the journey that would lead him to the cross.

During this season of Lent I am preaching a sermon series titled "A Journey to Hope". We are looking at different elements of our life. A lot depends on how we handle these circumstances. I believe our faith can inform and influence our behavior. With faithful decision making our outlook will stay positive and our journey through life can be hope filled.

Today the issue is self-esteem. I remember when Connie was very young; all the buzz in child development was self-esteem. We need to instill in our children a sense of positive self worth. Books were written on things parents, schools and churches could do to raise the self-esteem in our children.

I don't hear as much today about self-esteem as I did 10 years ago. I think child development folks still see this as an important issue, but maybe it got out of control. With so much attention given to our children, some of them developed an unhealthy sense of entitlement.

It's one thing to feel confident and good in your skin, it's quite another to think your God's gift to human kind. There is a difference between self-esteem and a feeling of superiority. If you are getting all kinds of attention and compliments, some times it's hard to stay grounded.

I believe Tiger Woods is an extreme example of this situation. He may have an addiction to sex, but I believe it all began with him feeling he was above the rules. Given the fame and fortune you can see how it happened, but it does not excuse his behavior. When you get married you make a vow. Just because you're a famous celebrity, it doesn't mean the vow doesn't count.

Clearly Tiger Woods is not the only celebrity whose ego is bigger than this sanctuary. Athletes, actors and actresses and music stars are not the only folks that suffer from an inflated sense of worth. There are persons in all fields of work that see themselves as better than others. You can see it in how they treat others.

I think we can all think of person like that. Do we enjoy being with them? Not at all! Spoiled or arrogant we just don't want to be around conceited people.

Jesus models for us an example of humble confidence. Jesus had no lack of self-esteem; he just didn't let his sense of worth get out of control.

So far I have talked about the concern of having too much self-confidence. Though this may be an issue for some, I believe the greater issue is the number of people with poor self-esteem.

For a variety of reasons there are countless persons living today that do not feel good about themselves. Those child development folks were right, in that, if you don't have a healthy sense of self worth, you end up participating in risky behaviors.

As part of its 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, Central United Methodist Church in Detroit had Rev. Jesse Jackson as a guest preacher. What I remember most about Rev. Jackson was his speeches in the 60's and 70's where he would say "I am" and the crowd would shout back "somebody!" In a time when white America was telling African Americans they were not worthy, Jesse Jackson was telling them they were important.

Given the crime, drug use, teenage pregnancy and drop out rate in the African American community, building the self-esteem of young African Americans was a priority for Rev. Jackson and other African American leaders.

Though it is 30 years later, I believe many young people; African American, Hispanic and Caucasian still need to know "they are somebody". The occurrence of risky behavior is very high among our young people. If one feels better about him self or her self, he or she will be more confident. With this self-confidence he or she will be more able to resist the temptations that exist today.

Tonight is the Academy Awards. One of the movies nominated for Best Movie of the Year is titled "Precious". This movie is about overweight, illiterate, a poor African American woman who suffers a variety of abuses from her father and mother. Those that have seen the movie say it's a raw portrayal of one beaten down by the world.

When you hear of persons in such an abusive situation you wonder why they don't get out of it. For some it's a matter of fear. Where would they go, how would they make it? Others take the abuse because they somehow feel they must deserve it. With no self-esteem they take what is given to them.

In the movie Precious eventually learns to believe in herself. She is able to stand up to her mother and leave home. It is a teacher and a counselor at the alternative school, Precious goes to, that instills in her this new sense of self worth.

In life, hopefully we do have friends, family and others that will affirm us. When we have doubts its good to know there are others that believe in you. Whether these folks are there for us or not, God is always for us. We are beautiful in God's eyes. If we can claim that love, what a difference it makes to our self-esteem.

I pray that everyone here this morning knows this acceptance of God. By the worlds standards we might not be smart enough, right enough, thin enough, young enough, athletic enough, but so what God loves us. I hope we have all claimed that love and it has helped us in our self-esteem.

But if you are feeling bad about yourself, if you question how worthy you are, know this God loves you. Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry a heavy burden and I will give you rest." (Mt.11: 28)  
"Nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

Claim that love and allow it to change your opinion about yourself. No, we are not better than others, but we are as good as others. You are beautiful no matter what they might say.

The movie "Precious" was an adaptation of a book named *Push* that was written by Geoffrey Fletcher.

Even though there is no actual person named Precious, there are many who have a similar story. So many folks feeling worthless! Christ is calling us, the church, to reach out to those hurting and let them know they are beautiful, no matter what they might say.

"Beautiful" it is a name of a song sung by Christina Aguilera. This is the repeat of the song:

I am beautiful no matter what you say  
words can't bring me down  
I am beautiful in every single way  
yes words can't bring me down, oh no  
so don't you bring me down today

As you reflect on those words, claim the beautiful person you are. Allow yourself to feel good about yourself. At the same time let us commit ourselves to helping others feel good about themselves. Bringing folks to a relationship with Christ goes a long way in helping this happen. Who can we reach out to today?