

A JOURNEY TO HOPE
From Self-Esteem to Esteem-of-Self in God
Mark 11:1-11

So you're probably thinking right about now, *"Isn't that the passage we usually read on Palm Sunday? Does PF have his Sunday's mixed up? If not, where are the children waving the palm crosses?"* Relax. I know it's not Palm Sunday, but this scripture from Mark's gospel helps us understand something very important about ourselves, about one another, and most importantly, about Jesus. Today, I want us to see the difference between "Self-esteem to Esteem-of-self in God."

In today's text, we find Jesus getting ever closer to Jerusalem and what awaits him there. We aren't told how, but Jesus has already made arrangements for his arrival. He sends two of his disciples into town to fetch a colt for him to ride into town. As he approaches the city gates, a huge crowd is waiting for him. They're giving him the royal treatment—the same treatment any king would receive. In an act of honor and respect, some lay their coats down on the ground in front of him. Others had cut palm branches to lay down on the road for him to pass by on. Still others waved them in the air, shouting, *"Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

But what's really going on here? Did he really need a "ticker-tape parade" to prove something to himself--to boost his ego? Was he trying to draw attention to himself? If not, then what was it?

Although I'm sure Jesus was flattered by the warm welcome, he also knew how quickly things would change by the end of the week—how these same people would turn on him and demand he be crucified. He went to Jerusalem, knowing he'd be rejected, betrayed by his closest friends, and put to death. Those shouts of Hosanna must have rung pretty hollow in Jesus' ears that day.

No. Jesus wasn't on some ego trip. Unlike a lot of celebrities that need large crowds and the paparazzi around to make him feel important, Jesus didn't need any of that. He didn't suffer from poor self-esteem, a low self-image, that's for sure. No. Jesus was perfectly secure in who he was. He knew the Father. He knew his mission. And he knew that how people reacted to his ministry had very little to do with him accomplishing his mission.

We've reached the second mile-marker on our "Journey to Hope." This is week two of our 5 week Lenten sermon series. For those of you who weren't with us last week, we're on a journey. Our destination is Hope—the hope we find in this life, and the life to come. But along the way, we know there'll be a few pot holes in the road and bumps in the road along the way. One of them I'd like to talk about today is "self-esteem." But what do we mean by "self esteem." Well, it's a term used in psychology to mean a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own self-worth. Other terms you've probably heard related to this are *self-respect*, *self-regard*, *self-confidence*, *self-efficacy*. It's important to know that there are many people today at both ends of this spectrum and everywhere in between. One of the major emotional problems with many people today is a poor self-image. They battle depression, lack of confidence, insecurity, and other psychological problems. Then there are those on the opposite end of the spectrum, who think they're the center of the universe and everything revolves around them. That's just as unhealthy—some might call it pride or even arrogance.

Today we're going to look to Jesus to help us understand **that a healthy self-image begins with knowing "who we are and whose we are."** And hopefully, it'll help us fulfill our calling as Jesus' disciples and fulfill the purposes God's created us for.

Question: ***What do you base your own self-worth or personal value on?*** Many people base it on things that, in the end, don't really matter. For instance, how much do you think is spent in this country each year on cosmetic surgery? According to American Society for Plastic Surgery, \$13 billion on 11.7 procedures in 2007! Americans spent 7 billion on beauty products in 2007. AVON annual sales last year, \$10.3 million. What about designer clothes, cars, and expensive homes? Some measure their self-worth on what they do—their careers, promotions, titles, degrees, grades, and other such accomplishments.

But the reality is that if we measure our self-worth simply by our outward appearance or our jobs, we're not only fighting a losing battle, but we're setting ourselves up for a terrible fall. Let's face it: sometimes we don't always meet our goals. Sometimes others don't recognize our accomplishments. Sometimes our looks don't meet society's ideals of beauty. What happens then?

I couldn't help but think of Tiger Woods as I prepared my sermon this week. Let me say right up front that I hope and pray that his mea culpa last week was genuine and sincere; that he's getting the help he needs; and he and his wife, Elin, can work towards reconciliation. Having said all that, I believe this is a

perfect example of what I'm talking about today—too much self-esteem, too big an ego, selfishness and pride.

Here's a man on top of the sporting world, the biggest name in sports, with unlimited resources from his winnings and product endorsements...and of course there are the women. His self-image was one that enabled him to believe he could have anything, do anything, and have anyone he wanted. And yet look where it led him. *"O how the mighty have fallen."*

I hope Tiger has learned something from all this and will one day return to the game of golf. But it's going to take time, help from others, and a power greater than himself. He proclaims to follow the Buddhist faith. I don't know much about Buddhism, but I sure hope there's something there that can help him and point him in the right direction. But frankly, I'd rather see him come to see the true light, the Light of the world, and come to the saving knowledge and healing grace of God through Jesus Christ!

But that's Tiger Woods. What about us? In my backpack is a mirror. Why? To remind us that every now and then we need to look at ourselves. What do you see when you look in the mirror? Ask, "Who am I?" But how often and how closely do we do that? We do a pretty good job sizing up everybody else, but what about our own self-image? What do we see when we look in the mirror?

I sent out an email last week to all of you and asked the following questions: *"Who do people say that you are? How are they right? How are they wrong."*

Me? Their pastor, teacher, husband, spiritual guide, worship leader, shepherd. All roles that I try to fulfill. Several of you wrote back with some great responses. For example, one person wrote that she thought people defined her by her characteristics or qualities. (nice, organized, and a good cook). Another of you said people defined her based on how well they knew her, what they hear about her or what they see her do. Another of you said your image was based on the perception by another that you were perceived as a very patient man. That person's response was, "I wished that that were true!" Another person saw themselves as the roles they play in life also--she's a mom, daughter, sister, student, teacher, boss, collector, etc. But this person also said something very profound: *"We are who we are in part due to our heredity and in part due to our experiences."* As I thought about

that, from a theological point of view, she's right! Theologically, her heredity is that of a child of God and her experience is that of an ongoing personal relationship with Jesus Christ that continues to grow daily. She summarized her self-image by saying, "I'm a Christian."

And that's exactly where I wanted to go today with this message. Genesis 1:27 tells us, from *The Message* translation, "*God spoke: 'Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature.'*" Did you catch that? You and I, and every human being that ever was, is, and ever will be, are created in the image of God! But what does that mean? It simply means that God created us with God's nature built into our spiritual DNA. IOW, we're created with the imprint of God's love built into us. We're made with the potential to love as God loves. You see, God created us out of pure love, and God's planted that love in our hearts and given us the potential to love God in return and to love others. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 139, "*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*"

You want to see that nature? We have to look no further than Jesus. Jesus said in John's gospel, "*Anyone who has **seen** me has **seen** the **Father**. How can you say, 'Show us the **Father**'?" And what do we see in Jesus: Love, compassion, goodness, patience, kindness, gentleness, truth, perseverance, faith, hope etc. And through the image of Jesus, we see the potential for a healthy image for ourselves as God's children. The problem, however, is this little thing called **SIN**. You see, when God created humanity, they were perfect. Through disobedience and human freedom, which God gave them, they fell from grace. That perfect image they were created in was forever distorted by sin. And today, we still suffer from that distortion. Things like greed, lust, envy, jealousy, pride, etc, distorted that image.*

But here's the good news folks! By God's grace, that image, that nature, can be restored through faith in Jesus Christ! God knows our self-esteem issues and our poor self-worth. God also knows the other extreme of pride and arrogance. In some cases, yes, it's due to sin. But in others, it's simply a matter of not knowing their loved by God! The other day I was working out in my study. I was playing some Ray Connick Jr. songs. The one that struck me was one of Sinatra's classics: "You're Nobody Till Somebody Loves You." Not a religious song by any means, but there is a profound truth in there! Knowing WHO you are and WHOSE you are; knowing that you are loved by God; knowing that God cares for you and cares about all your issues, can be a transforming moment in your life! You see, by God's grace, God's provided the antidote, the fix, the cure if you will, to our self-esteem problem! So I ask you: Do you have a low opinion of yourself? A poor self-image? Low self-esteem? You won't find the answer in any book in the Self-Help section at B&N. You won't find it in a pill, a bottle, or a syringe. You see, self-esteem comes only by allowing God's Spirit to come into your heart and transform your self-esteem into an esteem-of-self in God! Knowing that the Creator of the universe loves you with an everlasting love makes you a "somebody." If you have made that commitment , to follow Jesus Christ at some point in your life, know this: YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD! And that's all you need to know when someone asks you, WHO ARE YOU?