

All Are Worthy!
Rev. Mark Seifried @ Townsend
Congregational Church, UCC
October 23, 2005 – 23rd Sunday after
Pentecost (Friendship Sunday) I Thes.
2:1-8; Mt. 22: 34-46

Kids: Your parents are fat. Oh, you think that's bad. I have a list. Their teeth are yellow and they have bad breath. Their hair is too thin, too limp or too frizzy. They have body odor. Their clothes are out of style. Their home is dingy and everything in it is outdated. Their appliances are boring and don't do all they should. Their doctor is not telling them all that is wrong with them, but they may die if they take what she prescribes – at least they'll succumb to diarrhea, cramps, intestinal bleeding and vomiting if not chest pain, headaches, and sleeplessness. Oh yeah! They don't sleep right either. Their bed is uncomfortable. Their pillow causes nightmares and, yes, their bladder is a problem. If they just vacationed the right place, their world would change. If they drove the right car, they'd experience real life. All their dreams could come true if they contacted the right mortgage company. The list is endless and your parents are a mess.

If you watch television, read magazines or newspapers, or drive past billboards, the world assaults us with all that is wrong with us. Actually, if you watch television, what I just ranted about is only what the commercials tell you. The programs and news will tell you more: your world is unsafe, unloving, unstable, and under-funded. Your politics are wrong. Regardless of what you believe, you are incorrect. The President may make a speech that you can embrace, but within five minutes, the opposition party will tell you how wicked you were to believe what he said. You may like the governor, but tune in at 6:00 and find out how dumb you really are to believe a word he says.

Kids, the television world, the most powerful force in our culture, is telling you something, too. You're dumb. Your parents don't love you. Your toys stink. Your school is giving you the wrong education. It only

hurts a little when you fall off a cliff. It's not only okay to hit and shoot each other, but it's expected.

Kids and adults, let me tell you, "the world is insane!" They want you to feel second-rate. They want to make you feel like you don't know how to live. They want to make you wish you were better looking, smarter, younger, and more spiritual so you keep buying all their stuff.

Oh, I know I sound like one of those guys who thinks the world is out to get him. You know, last year I had my picture taken by a photography studio and on the pictures they finally sent, they erased the black bags under my eyes. They whitened my teeth. They took away my wrinkles and scars and fixed the cowlicks in my hair. I'm not sure about anyone else, but I am happy with the way God made me. My wrinkles and graying hair have stories to tell about who I've become and what I've learned. My blemishes and birthmarks make me an individual. I don't want to look like everyone else, much less act like people on television. What do you think? Does the world tell you are just right, much less a beautiful person? Does the world tell you that you are good and living the right way? NO!

[return to top](#)

What is wrong with the world is that the message of the gospel has been distorted and twisted so many ways that we are starting to believe it. A friend of mine who grew up in a family of preachers has had to undergo years of therapy. It was pounded into her that she was supposed to be without spot or wrinkle if she wanted to be Christian. She didn't let her husband see her without makeup for the first ten years of their marriage. She was going to raise a good Christian family and made them all look picture perfect whether they were at home or away from the house. This friend of mine told me that it wasn't until she had a crisis of faith, after her second radical cosmetic surgery, that her eyes were opened. Jesus couldn't love her while she was so frantically trying to be perfect. He didn't know who she was, so how could he help?

Our gospel lesson for today says that you must "love the Lord your God with your body your soul, and your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" I want you to forget, for now, the first two parts. I most often talk about how we treat others and how we respond to God. I want you to think about Jesus' commandment that you love yourself.

Do you love yourself? God does! Do you know how beautiful you are? God does! Do you care for yourself with exercise? Do you love yourself with things that will stretch your mind? Do you care for your soul with times of silence and reflection? Jesus says, "It's not an option. You must love yourself the way God does. You must care for yourself – your body, your mind and your soul. They're all connected and all important to the beautiful person you are."

God loves us deeply, so much so, that when Jesus was dying on the cross that he looked over at two rotten criminals hanging beside him and promised them that they would be with him in heaven. Jesus told them that God loved them so much that they would see heaven. That is hard for us to imagine: two lying, robbing, murderous thieves were loveable, at least in God's eyes. Imagine what God thinks of you. Imagine how much God loves you – not for who the media and advertising companies want you to be – but for who you are – the authentic you, the doubting you, the sinful you, the faithful you, the loving you. God knows who you are and what you're becoming and says, "I love you." If you don't believe that, you've lost faith by believing all the stuff they tell you on the outside.

Inside – in this house of God – you are precious and you are loved. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. It doesn't matter what you believe, or what you look like. It doesn't matter how well your appliances work, how much hair you have, how perky you are or what you do in your private life. God loves you and you will find that love in this house of God. Do you know how awesome that is? The world says, "you're tired and unloved," and God says, "WRONG! You are mine. You are worthy of my love." And, this is a church that believes that. Every week, we exclaim that no matter who you are or where you are on your journey, you are welcome here." God loves you and so will we – even if you seem to be unlovable.

You see, we have a God that tells us we can't live like the rest of the world. We can't believe like the rest of the world. If you want to be a Christian, you are going to have to believe in yourself and love yourself like God does. Then, you will know how easy it is to love your neighbor and love the God who made you both.

Let us remember that perfection is not an adjective that can ever be applied to humans. People who pretend to be perfect are either plastic, artificial, or dead. Christians are all flawed, broken, shattered people

through whom Christ, the light of the world, shines. To pretend we are not is incredibly unhealthy.

Worst of all, when we pretend we are perfect, our subconscious conspires against us to prove to us that our perfection is a lie. Maybe that is because to ever hope to be spiritually healthy we need a keen awareness that we are loved: both wonderfully made and always in need of God's grace. Amen.