

## **The Naked Truth about ourselves: We need to be loved and Accepted. #2**

**Luke 19: 1-10**

**March 29, 2009**

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

There was a superintendent of a nursing school talking to a group of students. The elderly superintendent told those young students: *Sometimes you'll be sitting at the nurses' station working on your charts, and the intercom will buzz you from one of the rooms down the corridor.*

*You will hear the patient say,*

\* *'Nurse, will you please bring me another blanket?' or*

\* *'Will you please bring me some fresh water', or*

\* *'Will you please come and adjust my bed?'*

*One of the things you will have to learn is when*

***not to listen to what a patient is saying with their lips, but to hear what they are really saying with their heart.***

*The message is very simple, and it's always the same. The patient is asking,*

***'Won't someone please come and show me some love.'***

The words of that superintendent spoke highly of her experience as a nurse, but they also indicated that she was aware of the greatest need of the human being. We all need to be loved and accepted.

There was a heart-breaking story in the **Girl Scouts magazine**, American Girl, several years ago. Listen to these words from a young woman:

*"When I was ten, my parents got a divorce. Naturally, my father told me about it, because he was my favorite. 'Honey, I know it's been kind of bad for you these past few days, and I don't want to make it worse. But there's something I have to tell you. Honey, your mother and I got a divorce . . . I know you don't want this, but it has to be done. Your mother and I just don't get along like we used to. I'm already packed and my plane is leaving in half an hour' 'But, Daddy, why do you have to leave?' 'Well, honey, your mother and I can't live together anymore.' 'I know that, but I mean why do you have to leave town?' 'Oh. Well, I've got someone waiting for me in New Jersey.' 'But, Daddy, will I ever see you again?' 'Sure you will, honey. We'll work something out.' 'But what? I mean, you'll be living in New Jersey, and I'll be living here in Washington.' 'Maybe your mother will agree to you spending two weeks in the summer and two weeks in the winter with me.' 'Why not more often?' 'I don't think she'll agree to two weeks in the summer and two in the winter, much less more.' 'Well, it can't hurt to try.' 'I know, honey, but we'll have to work it out later. My plane leaves in twenty minutes and I've got to get to the airport. Now I'm going to get my luggage, and I want you to go to your room so you don't have to watch me. And no long goodbyes either.' 'Okay, Daddy. Goodbye. Don't forget to write.' 'I won't. Goodbye. Now go to your room.' 'Okay, Daddy, I don't want you to go!' 'I know, honey. But I have to.' 'Why?' 'You wouldn't understand, honey.' 'Yes, I would.' 'No, you wouldn't.' 'Oh well, Goodbye.' 'Goodbye. Now go to your room. Hurry up.' 'Okay. Well I guess that's the way life goes sometimes.' 'Yes, honey. That's the way life goes sometimes.'"*

Would it surprise you to know that after that young woman's father walked out the door, she never heard from him again? It is a terrible thing to feel rejected.

The late great actor Laurence Olivier, who had 14 Oscar nominations and received best actor for the 1948 film, Hamlet, once spoke of that pain. He said, *"I have always thought that the initial trouble between me and my father was that he couldn't see the slightest purpose in my existence."*

Can anybody in this room relate to that? I do know one person who can relate to that. Jesus

**JESUS WAS REJECTED.**

During the Lenten Season we are reminded again that Jesus was rejected. **I Peter 2:7**

*The [very] Stone which the builders rejected.....*

Peter was quoting **Psalm 118:22**.

Jesus pitched a tent among his people and lived among them.

- \* People in his own community dismissed his preaching.
- \* People of his own faith labeled him a blasphemer.

And the eventual price for his rejection was the cross. The gentle carpenter from Nazareth crucified between two thieves.

We all know to varying degrees what it is like to be rejected and feel unloved. Perhaps you have been rejected by a family member.

You have been rejected in school or in the workplace. Some of you bear scars that no one else can see--scars of disappointment and pain.

We can even come from solid families and still you feel rejected. Maybe everything is going well for you today and yet inside of you there is a little child that feels unloved. You don't even know why you feel this way. But still, unspoken feelings of rejection haunt you.

On the wall of a **subway in New York City** was an advertising poster that depicted a dignified older gentleman recommending a particular product. Someone—probably a little boy—attempted to deface the advertisement by drawing a balloon coming out of the gentleman's mouth and writing in it the dirtiest thing he could think of.

He meant to write, "*I like girls*," but he made a mistake, and wrote, "*I like grils*." Someone had come along later and written with a felt-tipped pen, "*It's 'girls,' stupid, not 'grils.'*" Still another party had come along and written under that comment, "*But what about us grils?*"

What about us grils? There are times in our lives when we all feel like a gril.

**Luke 19:1-10** records the story of a man named Zacchaeus who was a gril. Even though the text doesn't say how Zacchaeus was feeling, I have to believe that Zacchaeus desperately wanted to be loved and accepted. But he knew in his heart that he was a gril. So when Jesus came to town, he wanted to see him. Maybe deep down inside he felt maybe here is someone in this world who will accept me and love me. As people pressed forward to see the Lord, Zacchaeus got shoved aside and crowded out. Grils get pushed out, don't they?

They say that when **boys are preschool** they are far more difficult to parent than girls. But when the girls reach junior high and high school they are more difficult to parent than teenage boys. I'll let you decide if that is true or not.

Back in high school I recall that girls had a tendency to be very cliquish. I have to believe that it's true today. They would form circles that are so tight that they deliberately kept certain girls out. It obvious who the grils were.

Zacchaeus got crowded out. Perhaps there are several reasons why Zacchaeus got crowded out. Of course we know that he was a tax collector. Tax collectors are not known to be accepted by the general public with open arms. Zacchaeus wasn't much more than a high-class thief; he worked on what we would call a "*cost-plus basis*."

When the Romans moved into an area, they granted tax-collecting **rights** to whoever made a bid to collect the highest taxes. Then that person collected the taxes they owed Rome plus as much as they wanted to line their own pockets. Roman soldiers escorted them to ensure people paid up. Zacchaeus, who was a Jew, was working for the conquerors of his fellow Jews. Worse yet, he was cheating them to make himself rich. So a fellow like that isn't popular. He might also have been a gril because the crowd was insensitive to him. They'd heard about Jesus, and they wanted to see him. They had heard that Jesus was loving, and they loved being loved. Yet, while thinking about love and seeing Jesus, they became unloving and insensitive. As a result, Zacchaeus got shoved aside. They were so anxious to have a good time that they didn't include Zacchaeus, who

also wanted to have a good time. Regardless of what made Zacchaeus a gril, when he realized he'd been crowded out, he climbed a tree. There was a little bit of boy in this man. He wanted to see Jesus, and he wasn't ashamed to admit it. He was willing to admit that he was lonely & feeling unloved. He was willing to admit that he was crowded out. He didn't care who saw him climb that tree.

Jesus walking by couldn't help notice Zacchaeus. Here is a grown man sitting up in the tree. Here was a man who was making a definite statement that he wanted to be loved and accepted. As you know body language is far more powerful than actual words.

When Jesus came to the tree. He stopped. He looked up. There for the first time the eyes of Jesus and the eyes of Zacchaeus met. Even though Jesus spoke the words, *Zacchaeus get down from that tree*, perhaps it was the very first time in a long time that someone actually looked in the eyes of Zacchaeus, and without saying a word communicated, *Zacchaeus, I love you. I accept you for who you are. You don't have to be hiding up in that tree. Come on down.*

There is a church in **Copenhagen, Denmark**, that houses the great **(Toor-vahl-suh) Thorvaldsen** statues. They're carved out of cold marble, but they look like warm, living personalities—so warm they melt your heart. The main statue, Jesus, depicts him with his arms extended. When you go up to the statue, it looks as though the eyes of Jesus are closed. He is looking down.

A visitor was standing there admiring the statue, meanwhile an old timer who comes to the church everyday to pray, was sitting on a bench nearby. The man finally said to the gentleman. *You have to get on your knees to see his eyes. Say what? You have to get on your knees to see his eyes.* So the visitor got down on his knees and looked up, and there were the eyes of Jesus looking down with such grace, compassion, and love.

In a strange way, Zacchaeus was climbing down that tree, the eyes of Jesus I'm sure were focused on him. Jesus was communicating with his eyes that he is actually loved and accepted. Zacchaeus, perhaps never experienced that type of love before. At that moment he felt he was no longer a gril but an actual person.

When the crowd realize that Jesus was accepting Zacchaeus with open arms they became **furious**. They didn't like Jesus spending time with grils. Their applause turned to murmuring; their smiles turned into sullen looks. Jesus rained all over their parade.

Why is it that the Church of Jesus Christ looks down on people who are grils? If Jesus accepts grils with open arms don't you think it would do us wise that we do the same? Isn't that the message of Lent, that the bare naked truth about ourselves is that we all grils. Haven't we all felt like outsiders at some point? We all need to be loved. Human love, yes, but most of all a love that is far greater than any human love. A supernatural love. That no matter who you are, what you have done, whatever your background might be, that you should be able to walk through the doors of this church and know without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus loves you, period. The good news of Jesus Christ is that he fulfills that deepest longing in all of us, to be loved and accepted unconditionally.

A **girl sat in a study of a pastors office** and the pastor asked her the blunt question: *Tell me, do you feel that ever in your life you have been loved?* Her words bursted out like a dammed - up flood. *Loved?* She laughed a cynical, sneering laugh, *By whom? My parents? They had to get married because I was coming. They certainly didn't love me. But that was just the beginning. It's been that way all my life. I never seem to fit in. I have never had what I could call real friends. People just don't seem to like me. And finally, I just gave up. Now look at me. Do you see anything that anyone would love? And only I know what a stinker I really am. No, no one has ever really loved me. But you know something else? I don't care!"* There was a moment of silence and the pastor looked at her and ask, *If you don't care, then why are you so heartbroken about it?*

And so the human heart cries out for the assurance that someone loves, someone cares. Without that knowledge, we die. It doesn't matter whether we go on living physically or not, we die. We know that deep down inside that we are grils. We know our shortcomings. We know our flaws. The naked truth about us is the fact that we so desperately want to be loved.

**Survivors.** The show is about putting people in a very stressful environment so that their raw emotions

begin to show. My wife convinced me to come to the home of where the survivor junkies were going to gather and watch the grand finale. After the winner was announced, I was ready to go home. 10:00 PM. My bedtime. The people there said, *Oh no, you have to stay another hour.* Jeff Probst, the host, interviews the people who just went through this grueling experience.

There was one guy named **Randy Bailey**, 49 years old and a videographer from Eagle Rock, Minn. He is described as one of Survivor's grumpiest contenders. Apparently he made a lot of enemies. Never connected with anyone during his time out in the wilderness. He was quite belligerent towards the other contestants.

During this interview, Jeff said to Randy, *Are you always like this in real life? Don't you have any friends? Don't you have anyone you love?* He replied, *No.*

But he went on to describe himself as angry, blunt, mean and sarcastic (yet charming), and admits he's a train wreck. He continues on by saying he has no living relatives besides an older brother, from whom he hasn't heard from in years. He says he has never met a person who didn't eventually disappoint him. The only "person" he has ever loved was his recently deceased black Labrador mix, Johnson, with whom he lived for 13 years.

Yet, the pain in his face was so evident. His heart was so cold. Before millions of people on national TV he was saying, *I'm a gril.*

I am absolutely convinced, that if the hardest of hearts like Randy would stop for just a moment, and contemplate the irresistible AGAPE love of God that it would penetrate his heart like a warm knife cutting through soft butter.

As **Paul Tillich, the great theologian**, put it so eloquently: *"Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness . . . It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign with us as they have for decades . . . Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "*

*You are accepted. . . ."*

That is the gospel of Lent. That while we are caught up in our sins that God sent his Son Jesus Christ to love us and accept us.

**The Archbishop of Paris** was preaching from the pulpit of Notre Dame Cathedral. He told about three young men who had, years before, banged their way into the sanctuary in alcoholic irreverence, daring one of their number to make a false confession to the priest. He accepted the bet, but the old priest to whom he went saw much deeper. *My son*, he said, *you have made your confession. I now impose the penance. Go into the chapel and look into the face of the crucifix hanging there and say these words: All this you did for me, and I don't give a damn.*

The young reveler tried to collect his bet, but the others refused until he had performed his penance. And so he went into the chapel. He stared into the face of the crucifix and said: *I don't give a ...*" But he couldn't finish, because he found himself on his knees with tears coming down his cheek. The Archbishop closed his story by saying, *I was that young man.*

And that is where we are - kneeling at the foot of the Cross,

- \* after all of our cockiness,
- \* all of our self-assurance,
- \* all of our indifference,
- \* all of our I-don't-give-a-blank-attitude

When all that has been drained out of us, we instinctively know that this is what we need and this is what we want most in life. We want to be forgiven. We want to be loved. The miracle is that God can see through all of this filth that is me, all of this rebellious will of mine, all the times I have shaken my fist at heaven, all the times I have pitted my own little puny, human will against the all powerful will of His, all the times that I have shouted, *It's my life, and I'll live it the way I want to.*"

God can see through all of that and yet he still loves me, and loves me, and loves me and loves me even

more. How can one explain that? No theological exposition can even come close.

### **John 3: 16** Amplified Bible

*For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He [even] gave up His only begotten ([a] unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have eternal (everlasting) life.*

There was a popular **medieval priest** who, one night, announced that he would preach a sermon on the love of God. The congregation gathered as the sunlight was still streaming through the stained glass windows of the cathedral. They sat there quietly, as did the priest, until darkness descended. It was almost completely dark. They wondered when the service would begin, when he would preach his sermon on the love of God. And then, finally, with just enough light to see, the medieval priest lit one candle. He walked over to the life-sized crucifix. He held up the candle to each one of the pierced hands, to the spiked feet, to the stabbed side, and then to the thorn-crowned head, as the congregation sat silently they began to weep.

Yes, that's the sermon on the love of God. *Greater love hath no man than this....*

What, after all do I really know about God? I'm embarrassed to say, not much. But, I do know one thing, He loves me and he loves me and he loves me. How? Because Christ died for me. Unbelievable! Unspeakable! A bewildering mystery! .

As **Bishop Aulen** once said: *Nothing can be said of God, about his power, or his wrath, or his flaming righteousness that in the final analysis isn't a statement of his love.*

**(Kah-gah-wah) Kagawa**, a great Japanese Christian, who lived in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When he was a teen, he became a Christian and was disowned by his family. He decided that he had a vocation to help the poor, and that in order to do so effectively he must live as one of them. For over 10 years, he lived in a shed that was only 6 square feet in the slums of Kobe. He went on to become one of the great social reformers in Japan. While wandering among his people in the slums of Kobe, he picked up a little orphan beggar child later on he wrote this little verse:

*Holding a beggar's child  
Against my heart  
Through blinding tears I see  
That as I love this dirty, piteous, little thing,  
So God loves me.*

**Frederick M. Lehman**, author and composer, was at a camp-meeting when he was a young man. The evangelist climaxed his message from an ancient Jewish poem **Had da mut** written in Aramaic 1050 AD. The profound depths of that poem never left Frederick Lehman. Years later, because of hard economic times, he was forced to make a living by hard manual labor. One day, during a break from his hard work, he picked up a scrap of paper and, seated upon an empty lemon box pushed against the wall, with a stub pencil, wrote two verses and a chorus to a hymn. Then he finished the hymn by adding the third stanza. The third stanza were the words to that ancient Jewish poem that he heard years ago at a camp-meeting.

Years later after the hymn was published, there was a patient in an insane asylum who spent most of his time alone. Everyone thought he was totally out of touch with reality. The few times when he did speak, he didn't make any sense. One night he died alone. The next morning the staff found him dead in his little room. As the patient was being carried off to his grave one of the workers found the words of the third stanza penciled on the wall of his room. The words of the third stanza reads like this:

*(3) Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Though stretched from sky to sky.*

A few weeks ago my nephew came up with his daughter for my dad's birthday. Of course they visited Niagra Falls. To capture the love of God is like trying to capture Niagra Falls with a tea cup.

If I could peel back the layers of your heart today, is there a little child inside of you that wants to be loved? I'll answer the question for you. Yes! And a thousand times yes!

Like Zacchaeus, Jesus is looking into your eyes this morning, without saying a word, is saying to you, *I love you. I love you. I love you.* Will you open your heart this morning to receive that love?

**Hymn: Love of God.**

*(1) The love of God is greater far  
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;  
It goes beyond the highest star,  
And reaches to the lowest hell;  
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,  
God gave His Son to win;  
His erring child He reconciled,  
And pardoned from his sin.*

**CHORUS:**

*O love of God, how rich and pure!  
How measureless and strong!  
It shall for evermore endure  
The saints' and angels' song.*

*(2) When years of time shall pass away,  
And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,  
When men, who here refuse to pray,  
On rocks and hills and mountains call,  
God's love so sure, shall still endure,  
All measureless and strong;  
Redeeming grace to Adam's race-  
The saints' and angels' song.*

The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:

**Resource Materials:**

**Louis Valbracht: Naked and Running Away**

**Bruce Thielemann: When Life Crowds You Out**

