

Last Sunday we talked about our past and the power of our past; what we did, what was done to us or just the experiences of life; as having the power to define our future. But what I hope you remembered all week long was that *Your past does not define your future. (My past does not define my future.)*

One way that our past tries to define our future is by telling us that we are not worthy of love. Because of what we did or because of what was done to us we believe that we are not worthy of love, especially the love of God. And that is what leads us to ask today's question, "Why do you love me?"

Certainly God can love other people; after all we believe John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world...' but the world doesn't include me; so, why would God love me?

Here is what you need to remember today: God's love doesn't depend on us- God doesn't love us because of, or in spite of, our past/present/future; God loves us because God is love.

God loves us because that is who God is. Twice in 1 John 4, he writes: God is love. (1 John 4:8,16)

When we capture that truth about God we begin to recognize that it is because God is love that we are made significant. Nowhere else is that more evident than in Luke 15.

<http://bible.us/luke15.1-2.niv> Here are three parables that demonstrate how the love of God makes us significant- again it is not who we are, what we've done, or what was done to us; but simply because God is love.

Now the first thing I want you to notice about this passage is the two audiences that were hanging out and listening to Jesus. First, there are the tax collectors and sinners. These are people who have heard all their lives that they are not worthy of God's love. They had pretty much come to believe that it was true- that is until they started to hear this guy named Jesus who told them they were loved by God.

The second group is the people who have been making the first group feel unloved. The Pharisees and legal experts believed that they were loved by God because of how perfectly they lived- keeping the Law of God right down to the smallest details. What they found troubling with Jesus was that he spoke of a God they didn't recognize- a God who loved people in the first group just as much as he loved those in the second.

I think there are a lot of people who would put themselves in the first group. They believe what others have told them- they are not loved; their past makes them unworthy of God's love. They believe that not only are they unworthy of God's love; but for many of them the church perpetuated the idea by telling them that until they get their life right; they are not welcome in the church.

So Jesus steps into the gap between these two audiences and begins to tell three stories about God's character. Stories that challenge the second group to reconsider how they view God and most importantly tell the first group that God loves them and is willing to go to any length and prove it!

In the first story <http://bible.us/luke15.1-2.niv> , Jesus tells us about the shepherd who leaves 99 sheep to seek out 1 lost sheep. And upon finding the lost sheep he throws a party!

Then Jesus tells us about a woman who loses 1 of her ten coins <http://bible.us/luke15.1-2.niv> . She lights a lamp, rolls up her sleeves and cleans until she finds the missing coin. Then she throws a party because what was lost is found!

In each of these parables, the sheep and coin are made significant by the loving care and attention of the shepherd and woman who demonstrate their worth, their value. The love of the seeker is what demonstrates the great value of the lost item.

I can make this really understandable. [Holding up a ribbon from the church opening in Sierra Leone.] Why is this valuable? I know it doesn't look important to you; and nobody in their right mind would give me a nickel for it; but because of who I am and the significance of this to me, it is highly valuable!

That's how it works with God. The world may say because of your past you are worthless; but because God is love you are valuable, you are his beloved!

So God's seeking of us through Jesus demonstrates that we are of great worth- that we are loved because God is love.

There is also something very important to understand here because God is love. Because God is love he doesn't pick and choose whom he loves- God can't do that because God is love, and we are loved- every single one of us undeserving people who inhabit the planet.

Our favorite story of the three is the last- the parable of the prodigal son <http://bible.us/luke15.1-2.niv> . In the story of the Prodigal Son, we find a young man who thinks that his past- his wild living and unclean lifestyle- will prevent him from being loved. In the prodigal's mind he is no longer his father's son, he is now a slave, a servant in the house of his father.

But what happens; the father, who has apparently been looking daily for his son to come home, runs to his son when he sees him cresting over the horizon. (That would have incensed the second group listening to group!)

The father does not let the past define his relationship with his son. (This is a challenge for us to apply to our relationships.) While the son feels that he must work to earn the father's love; the father simply loves his son- because that is who God is! God is love. And it is God's love that makes us loveable! Nothing from our past will ever prevent the father from running to us and wrapping us in his robes.

There is a beautiful picture here of what the love of God does for us. And I think we can see Jesus drawing a connection that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

In Genesis 3 <http://bible.us/gen3.1.niv> we read the account of how sin entered the world. Suddenly Adam and Eve are aware of their nakedness and are ashamed of their past. Now what did Adam and Eve try to do to cover their shame? They used fig leaves, which I think after a day or two would have shriveled up and blown away. So in verse 21 we find a picture of

God's love. Verse 21 says that God made garments of skin for Adam and Eve and clothed them.

Here is a key point to remember; for God to fashion clothes for Adam and Eve something has to sacrifice. This is just a foreshadowing of what would be the sacrificial system and later Jesus death on the cross.

We often try to hide our past behind fig leaves. But God says he has something better. And out of God's love he fashions a covering that takes away our shame. Isaiah 61:10 says: I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness. (note that it is not our righteousness; it is Jesus righteousness given to us.)

Note who does the action here. God clothes me, God arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness. It is not what we do, who we are or what we have done; it is what God does because of who God is. I wonder if the Apostle Peter had that same image in mind when he wrote 1Peter 4:8: "Love covers over a multitude of sins." Love covers the past!

As we close this morning I pray that you have heard that God loves you. Loved you enough to search you out, loved you enough to cover you with his robes, and loved you enough that he sent his one and only son into the world to give his life for you.

I know that God loves me, and that God loves you, because I've experienced the love of God by opening my heart and life and inviting Jesus to be my savior, my lord, my everything for life.

My prayer this morning is that you can leave here knowing that God not only loves the world, but most importantly that he loves you. So let's remind ourselves of that truth today as we say together the words of John 3:16 inserting our name for the word world.

For God so loved \_\_\_\_\_ that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.

John 3:16