

Back to School: *Being Somebody*

Biblical Text: I Peter 2:4-10

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The 139th Psalm says this: ***“You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”***¹

The problem is that most of us do not know that *“full well.”*

Most of us don't look in the mirror, like this one, every morning and say, ***“I am fearfully and wonderfully made! Yes, yes, yes!”***

That's not what we do, is it?

Instead, we see our shortcomings, our hair or hair color or lack of hair, our skin, our blemishes or wrinkles, our flaws, our age, our failures, regrets, and even our past. *That's what we do.*

We accentuate every misstep and mistake, maximize every limitation and liability, and overlook any virtue or asset. *That's what we do.*

And maybe, because we are so hard on ourselves, we do it to others as well. It's hard to admit. But *that's what we do.*

How many times have we said things in another's presence like this: ***“This is my son John – would you stand up straight?”***

“This is my sister Susan – she's still single you know.”

And it gets worse when they are not around,

“Billy – well, he's just not the sharpest pencil in the pack.”

If you come from the south, you might add, *“bless his heart,”* as if that compensates for the negative assessment. It doesn't.

Those things stick to our hearts and minds like superglue. We often end up feeling like we are ***nobody***, identified only by our failures and flaws, sins and shortcomings. But even if we have them, and we do, that's not the whole story of who we are.

In case you missed the underlying message of this series for the start of school, it's all about your identity, who you are in Christ.

¹ Psalm 139: 13-14. *New International Version*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission.

The “Bible Secret” hidden in plain sight says, *“Christ is in you”* –when you *“accept that you are accepted,”* it changes everything!

God has designed you to *“thrive, and not just survive.”* No one can look down on you - *“you are beloved, a child of God and precious.”*

In a world that pronounces so many people, so many of us as *“unacceptable”* or *“not good enough,”* that’s good news!

Most Christians have overworked Romans 3:23, ***“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”*** And it is true.

But we also need to remember Romans 3:24, ***“But we are justified freely by his grace!”***²

God’s grace makes all the difference! We know that. If we are Christians, we have heard that somewhere. We sing songs of faith and forgiveness and grace and hope and joy. But we forget.

Every Monday morning, we are reminded that we live in what I call the ***“the present imperfect.”*** So do our families. And when we look in the mirror, or fail to live up to someone’s expectations, including our own, we veto the abundant life Jesus promised by remembering our pain, or failures, or sins, or shortcomings, or disappointments.

We need to remember *“Leave It to Beaver”* was not a documentary! Amen? Our families are not perfect - neither are we.

But there are some things we are. And I know of no more powerful Biblical reminder than this one from our text this morning: ***“Once you were no people. But now you are the people of God”***³

Or to put it in the first person, ***“Once I was nobody. But now I am somebody. I am a child of God.”***
(Repeat that with me.)

I love the story of John Osteen. His son, Joel Osteen, is now a well known, a TV talk show guest, with a million dollar smile. But before there was Lakewood Church, the largest Church in America, there was John Osteen.

² Paraphrased by the author from Romans 3:23-24.

³ Ibid. I Peter 2:10^a. *New International Version*®.

His story is compelling.

John was a divorced, former Baptist preacher who believed people were not designed by God to live in guilt, but rather in grace. When he left the Southern Baptist Church, he started Lakewood Church in a dusty, abandoned feed store in north Houston.

He used an affirmation every Sunday that goes this way: ***“This is my Bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do.”*** Lakewood Church still uses it today.

That’s what Peter was reminding his readers of in our text. I wish we could claim that truth. It would change our lives if we would.

But it doesn’t happen automatically. It doesn’t happen just because you see it on TV or hold up your Bible in the air. It happens when you genuinely embrace the forgiveness and grace of God.

Peter continues in our text, ***“Once you had not received mercy. But now you have received mercy.”*** (1 Peter 2:10b)⁴

Or again, to put it in the first person, ***“Once I was un-forgiven. But now I am forgiven.”*** Or this way, ***“Once I lived in guilt. Now I live in grace.”*** **It makes all the difference.**

One way of understanding the Bible is to see it as the story, over and over, of how God changed the course of lives, careers, families and even history, as people repented, turned their lives Godward.

About twenty years ago I drove from Kansas City to Oklahoma City to visit a new congregation named Church of the Servant.

I fell in love with their passion for ministry. They were committed to love anyone who would come in their door. People whose lives were full of blessing, but also those broken by divorce, hurting folks, folks with a past, people who needed a new beginning.

They just loved them into believing that in Jesus, their sins could be forgiven, their brokenness redeemed, that their lives could matter.

Most of all, I loved their Church symbol. As one entered their building, at

⁴ Ibid. I Peter 2:10^b. *New International Version*.

the main entrance, there were flowers growing in an old, dented trashcan. It was their symbol, their non-verbal message that people mattered to them and to God.

The message was powerful, unmistakable. God, who made creation from the dust of the earth, can dust people off when they fall and fail, and can redeem and recycle their lives for His glory!

We see that so clearly in the life of the man who is the author of our text, the apostle Peter. The threads of his theology from our text are woven through his own personal life and experience with Jesus.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all agree that Jesus asked Peter a question that he asks to each of us, **“Who do you say that I am?”**⁵ And Peter’s answer to Jesus became one of the early confessions of faith, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”**⁶

Peter became one of Jesus greatest disciples, but also His greatest failure! Those of us who have looked at his life not only remember his great confession, but his great denial after the crucifixion, when John 18 tells us that Peter denied Jesus three times.

That happens in our discipleship, at least in mine. We mess up, miss the mark, and choose the wrong way. Can we be honest for a moment together and admit it here this morning? We do. All of us.

We fall. We fail. But don’t you see? It’s not the failing. It’s not the falling that is the heart of the Gospel. It’s the honest admission of our faults and failures, and then the getting up to face another day because of the love and grace and mercy of God.

That’s why Peter could write his powerful words, **“Once you were no people. Now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy. Now you have received mercy.”**⁷

He had been there, in failure, and brokenness and shame.

But that was not the end of his story. And it is not the end of ours.

You failed me. OK, you did. You fell. OK, you did. Get back up. I have

⁵ Ibid. Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20, Matthew 16:15, *New International Version*.

⁶ Ibid. Matthew 16: 19-20. *New International Version*.

⁷ Ibid. 1 Peter 2:10. *New International Version*.

work for you to do.

There once was a man, you could see him from the back of the Church when you came in the door. His face in his hands, convinced he was unloved, a failure, of no use to anyone. Not to God, or to his family, or to himself. He was carrying the weight of his world on his shoulders.

But somehow the love of God met his heart, and set him free to discover that he was special, gifted, loved of God. And life was never the same.

Nearly thirty-two years ago, that man was me.

Maybe you've felt like that before. Maybe you feel like that today.

You may have come to worship today thinking, *"I am nothing."*

You are not nothing.

You may have come to worship today thinking, *"No one cares."*

You are wrong. He cares.

You may have come to worship today thinking, *"I am unworthy."*

Well, you are. I am. But the Good News is not that. It is this:

He has counted you worthy!

You may have come to worship today thinking, *"I am nobody."* You are not nobody. In Christ, **You are somebody!**

You are a child of God, fearfully and wonderfully made.

You are a sinner, but you are redeemed by grace.

You are a failure, but forgiven - and called to follow Jesus.

You can live your life for the glory of God.

And once you know who you are, you will never be the same.

In Jesus' name, amen.