

You Are Precious What Are You Looking For?

Texts: Isaiah 49:1-7

1 Corinthians 1;1-9 (Series A, 2nd Sunday after Epiphany) Ps.40:1-11

John 1:29-42

Prayer: Key verse: John 1:3 "This is God's chosen One"

The social scientists tell us that one of the causes of depression is a poor self-image. This was true, apparently, in the case of a woman who became so depressed her husband arranged for her to see a psychiatrist.

After listening to the patient for a while, the therapist asked her husband to come in from the waiting room. "Your wife is suffering from a poor self-image," the doctor said.

Where upon, he approached his wife and tenderly kissed her. "You see," he said, "her face is glowing. This is the kind of treatment she needs." "Okay, doctor," the husband replied. "I can bring her in on Tuesdays and Thursdays."

God created man / woman in His image; in the divine image He created him; male and female He created them (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). There is no boasting about it. This is the Word of God. It is the one Word of God, perhaps above all others, that we find hardest to accept, the divine within.

According to an ancient Hindu legend, there was a time when all human beings were gods. However, they treated their divinity with such disrespect that Brahma, the chief god, decided that their divinity should be taken from them and hidden in a place where they would never again find it.

The question was, "Where to hide it?" Brahma consulted with all the lesser gods on the problem. The lesser gods said, "Let us bury man's divinity deep in the earth." But Brahma said, "That will not do. Man will dig into the earth and find it."

Then the lesser gods said, "Let us sink man's divinity in the deepest sea." "But Brahma replied, "That will not do. Man will learn to penetrate the deepest waters and will find it on the ocean bed."

Then the lesser gods said, "Let us hide man's divinity on the highest mountain peak." But Brahma again disagreed. "Man will surely climb to the top of all the earth's mountains and some day will find it."

The lesser gods were discouraged. "It seems there is no place on land or sea that man will not eventually reach." Then Brahma said, "We will hide man's divinity deep in man himself. He will never look for it there." "And ever since then," the legend concludes, "*man has been climbing, digging, diving, exploring -- searching for that which is already within himself.*"

The divine within is tempting, to the point where we claim it out right. I am aware that the *New Age movements* have the tendency to run with this concept. According to the Scriptures, we are created in the image of God, but we are not God. Even though we share God likeness, we are mortal, finite, and derive our very being from God above.

Martin Luther made trips to Rome between 1510-1511 the things he saw just didn't add up. Martin Luther struggled for years regarding the moral state of the Church, Finally on October 31, 1517 he nailed the 95 Theses. That gave birth to the Protestant movement. What changed Martin Luther? The Scripture.... "*Der Gerechte wird aus Glauben leben*"....."*the just shall live by faith alone*" Rom. 3:22.

"To you the secret of the Kingdom of God has been confided... The Kingdom of God is in your midst" (*Lk. 17:21*), Jesus told His disciples. It is not a matter of reporting that it is "here" or "there," He said. Rather, "The Kingdom of God is at hand" (*Mk. 1:15*). The Reign of God, the Rule of God, the Kingdom of God, the Spirit of God is within you.

Whatever our life situation, the quality of our self-image and the quality of our life depend absolutely on whether or not we have made the great discovery of the divine potential within us by accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour, only and only then do this amazing gift of God within us becomes reality.

In a novel by *Lloyd C. Douglas*, Miriam is telling Marcellus the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector whose life was totally changed after he had spent an hour or so visiting with Jesus.

"But what had happened?" Marcellus asks. "Nobody knows," Miriam replies. "Maybe He didn't say anything at all. Perhaps Jesus looked at Zacchaeus squarely in the eyes until the man saw – what is reflected there -- the image of the person he was meant to be."

In today's Gospel lesson, John the Baptist captures the image of the person Jesus was meant to be from all eternity. "... when John caught sight of Jesus coming toward Him, he cried out, Look! *This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!*" (Jn. 1:29).

Then he said, I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from the sky, and it came to rest on Him. Now I have seen for myself: This is God's chosen One (Jn. 1:32, 34). The greatest sin of all is not to know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour and experience the spirit of God that lies within every individual. Jesus has come to look us squarely in the eyes until he sees -- reflected there -- the image of the person we were meant to be.

John Newton, is remembered for his great Christian preaching and for his role in the production of many outstanding sacred hymns. His mother died when he was seven-years-old and, with his father at sea, he was left largely on his own. As a young man, later went to sea and became a slave-trader in Africa.

And if ever there was a man with a poor self-image it was John Newton. According to one writer, he was "*a wreck of a man ... He was a hard, rough, dirty sailor with a foul language and an appetite for rotten living. He hated life and life hated him.*"² But, somehow, into the hands of this "*wreck of a man*" was placed a copy of "*The Imitation of Christ*" by Thomas A. Kempis.

John Newton read the book and slowly began to change. For six years he struggled to find inner-peace until finally he began to *love* life, and life began to *love* him. When he entered the ministry, he wanted people to know that he had a marvelous secret to share and he went all over England sharing his secret in his preaching. *The amazing grace of God.* The divine within each and every one of us.

Toward the end of his life (*he died in 1807*) he insisted on preaching every Sunday even though he was nearly blind and needed an assistant to stand with him in the pulpit. One Sunday, during his sermon, he repeated the phrase, "*Jesus is precious.*"

His assistant whispered to him, brother John, "*You've already said that twice.*" Newton replied, "Yes, I've said it twice, and I'm going to say it again." Then, at the top of his old voice Newton cried out once more, "*Jesus is precious!*"

Oh! What a wonderful expression of one's feeling for God's chosen One: the *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Lamb of God who takes away the great sin of humankind, the Lamb of God who shows us how to know and experience the divinity that lies within every individual!* Oh! Yes, Jesus is precious!

Now I want to tell you a secret. You are precious, all of you sitting here this morning. You are precious to the God who made you in his image. You are chosen by God to reveal his loving presence in the world through your unique self.

There is a beautiful Hindu word of greeting that means, literally, "I salute the divinity in you." The word is "*Namaskar*" (pronounced nummuskar). The word is a wonderful prescription for improving the self-image.

"Namaskar! I salute the divinity in myself. *I am precious.*" Having done that, you might find yourself saying (*mentally, at least*) to everyone you see through the day: "Namaskar! I salute the divinity in you! *You are precious!*"

Creation reveals this marvelous truth, just look around, the evidence is there. "*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge*" (Psalm 19).

Open up the windows of your soul! Look! *This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. What are you looking for? He is easy to find. He is the divinity within you. "All to Jesus I surrender... all to him I freely give..."*

**May the peace of God which passes all understanding,
keep your heart and mind through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

2 - Butterworth, E., "Discover the Power Within You" (adapted).