

A Few Feet From the Crowd  
August 12, 2007

Message Segment 3:

Message Segment 1:

I suspect that there have been times when many of us have felt different, like a misfit at home, at school, at work, wherever we are. Maybe we aren't interested in what so many others seem to be interested in, or we don't spend our time doing what others do. We see this kind of thing all the time in our schools when certain kids are considered "cool" because they do what folks expect them to do, while others seem to walk to the beat of a very different drummer.

How do we go about being ourselves, in spite of the pressure that's all around us to be like everyone else? How do we even begin to figure out who we are and what is unique about us? How do we deal with being different, when we just want to fit in?

That's what we're going to be exploring this morning, and we're going to do it using a movie entitled *Happy Feet*—a story about a little penguin who wasn't quite like all the other little penguins, and the struggles he faced and conquered as a result of being who he was made to be.

I hope, as we watch the various segments of the movie, that we think about our own lives, and the uniqueness that God has planted within us. What are the qualities and characteristics that distinguish us from everyone else? Maybe we will need to ask ourselves if we're living true to who we are. If not, perhaps we'll have to decide what to do about that.

In case you haven't seen the movie, let me give you a little background. These are the penguins that live in Antarctica, and if you recall from the education we got when we used *March of the Penguins* a year or so ago, the penguins mate, an egg is produced, and the mothers go away during the long winter to get nourishment while the fathers care for the egg and keep it warm.

Unfortunately, Memphis—the father in our story—dropped the egg. Dropping the egg is the one thing that the male penguins are never supposed to do, because it can result in all kinds of consequences. Let's see what happened in this case.

Message Segment 2:

The little one gets off to a really rough start. And then the time comes for him to begin school. As both a former schoolteacher and as a parent, I have to say that I worry at times that schools are often about subtly encouraging children to fit in and be like everyone else, rather than being able to discover their real selves and live in tune with that. Both individuality and uniqueness don't seem to be highly regarded. Let's take a look.

As I watched this movie, I was reminded of an article I had read about the singer Josh Groban. He talked about the transition he went through between seventh and eighth. That's when it began to be clear that he was different from the others. As he put it, "I was the boy who liked to sing his own songs at talent show, and I was suddenly officially uncool." He could see that the things he valued weren't shared by anyone else. It seemed apparent to him that the school he attended was partial to athletes and star students, and he said that he was neither. He felt like a misfit.

I would guess that some of us have felt that kind of pressure to be like everyone else, to fit in, and we have experienced the sense of failure and rejection when we couldn't do that. Josh Groban shared that he couldn't wait for the interminable school day to end so he could go home to his room to play drums and piano and compose music. He said, "I had so much to express, but no way to express it."

Let's see how Mambo deals with it.

Message Segment 4:

It's painful sometimes to see the extent to which we'll go to try to fit in. We compromise our values, because we want to be liked; we dress like everyone else, or we pretend we enjoy what others enjoy—just to belong. This is tough enough for teenagers, but it's something that can haunt us for much of our lives, if we never allow ourselves to find our own true heart song. We may wind up spending a lot of time and energy trying to be something we're not. Let's see what Mambo attempted.

Message part 5:

At some time or other, we have to give up trying to be something we're not, and focus on being the person we're created to be. That's what Paul is writing to the Romans in one of our Bible passage. The version from the Message says, "**Let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.**"

You see, each of us is a unique individual. No two of us are alike, and that's the wonder of a human being. An unknown writer put it like this: "**What should the goal of our lives be other than being ourselves? Although we were all born equal, we were all born different. Although we all share the same fears, feelings and fancies, we express them differently.**"

living human being. Where do we find the courage to begin to live out the God-identity we have been given? It's risky business, and it takes courage.

## **Message Segment 6:**

Our other Bible passage is Jesus sharing in what we often refer to as the Sermon on the Mount. In it, he's encouraging us to be who we're meant to be. Our version puts it like this: "Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."

Ralph Waldo Emerson may have been trying to say a similar thing when he wrote these words: "Do not follow where the path may lead. Go, instead, where there is no path and leave a trail." Let's see how Mambo's living true to who he was left a trail.

## **Message Segment 7/Closing:**

There's an old Hebrew story about a Rabbi named Zusya. He said that, when it's all said and done and we come face to face with God, we will not be asked why we weren't Moses, or one of the other great leaders or Prophets. Rather, he believed that God would say to him, "Why were you not Zusya?"

Each of our lives is about living as who we are, as the person we were created to be, as our own unique selves. When our life is over, will we be answer to say that you and I have each been our own self, and no one else? I hope so.