

"Covered with the Fingerprints of God,"

23 January 2005

Bible passage: **Psalm 139:14-15** (*The Message*)

*Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
You formed me in my mother's womb.
I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
I worship in adoration—what a creation!
You know me inside and out,
You know every bone in my body,
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
How I was sculpted from nothing into something.*

There's a Peanuts cartoon where Snoopy the dog is sitting droopy-eyed at the entrance to his dog house. He is saying to himself, "Yesterday I was a dog. Today I'm a dog. Tomorrow I'll probably still be a dog." Then there's a frame with him giving a big sigh. The last frame says, "There's so little hope for advancement." Unfortunately, I suspect many of us are Snoopy-like when it comes to appreciating and honoring who we are. So many of us want to be someone or something different; we simply not content with who we are.

Apparently, that's not an uncommon thing. Even some of the beautiful people some of us admire and dream of being like are dissatisfied with who they are. In fact, a few years ago, a survey was conducted of 12 well-known actors and actresses. The survey was basically asking what they thought of themselves, especially in terms of physical appearance. They were asked to make a list of any changes they would make in their looks. The average respondent listed anywhere from 4-12 alterations they would make in their personal appearance. Not one was totally satisfied! And that was just in regards to surface appearance; it didn't really have anything to do with how they felt inwardly about themselves. However, I would guess that they were probably not happy with themselves in that regard either.

It really is all about self-concept, our self-esteem, and that seems to be an issue with which many of us wrestle. Sometimes it may have to do with our outward appearance. We wish we were taller, shorter, thinner, had different color hair, had a smaller nose, longer neck, and on and on. We're always finding something wrong with us, and it often begins with our body shape and size, but it doesn't usually stop there.

Many of us are used to being put down by others, and have had it happen so often that we really believe that we're no good, that we're incompetent, that we're not very likeable or loveable people. We often internalize the criticisms we receive, and repeat them over and over, beating ourselves up when no one else is available to do it for us. In other words, many of us are pretty hard on ourselves and have a very poor sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

It's too bad when that happens, because positive regard for self, a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem is really essential for our well-being. Dr. William Glasser put it this way: "All psychological problems, from the slightest neurosis to the deepest psychosis, are merely symptoms of the frustrations of the fundamental need for a sense of personal worth. Self-esteem is

the basic element in the health of any human personality."

That's pretty heavy-duty, isn't it? However, I believe Dr. Glasser is right. Self-esteem is basic to our well-being. Let me be clear on one thing. When I'm talking about self-esteem, I'm not talking about being perfect and making no mistakes. That's impossible because we're all human and we all make mistakes.

I'm also not talking about having to be better than someone else. This doesn't have anything to do with anyone else; it has only to do with how we are with ourselves. Do we honor who we are? Do we have self-respect and positive self regard? Can we be realistic about our failures and shortcomings and use them as building blocks to the future rather than being a wrecking ball for who we believe we are?

An unknown writer put it this way: "Your duty is to be. Not to be somebody, not to be nobody—but just to be." It is really accepting who we are just as we are, acknowledging that we have our flaws, but being able to honor and value ourselves with our flaws.

I think that's where the Bible passage we have for today really can say a lot. Our version of Psalm 139 reads like this: Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;

You formed me in my mother's womb.

I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!

Body and soul, I am marvelously made!

I worship in adoration –what a creation!

You know me inside and out,

You know every bone in my body,

You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,

How I was sculpted from nothing into something.

The psalmist is ecstatic with the realization that God knows us inside and out, and can with all honesty say the words, "Body and soul, I am marvelously made!" In the language we're using today, each of us is "covered with the fingerprints of God." We are God's handiwork, God's masterpieces.

If you stop to think about it scientifically, we are indeed marvelously made! We're told that our bodies have over 100 trillion cells; our skin is made in such a way that it allows water to go out, but will not permit it to come in. Our bones can support more weight than bricks. Our blood carries food to every extremity of our bodies; our hearts pump about 100,000 times a day through 60,000 miles of arteries and veins and capillaries! We really are wonderfully made!

It seems to me that this psalm is a wonderful starting place for developing a sense of self-esteem. God made us, and we are marvelously made. God knows us inside and out; God shaped us and formed us in our mother's womb; God knows exactly how each of us was made. God knows us better than we know ourselves, and the remarkable wonderful thing about that is that God loves us, completely and unconditionally, no strings attached. God doesn't wait to see how attractive or homely we may be, how kind and generous or mean and miserly we are, how patient or impatient

we are, how tall or short, how fat or thin, how smart or dull, how gifted or ordinary our talents may be. God just plain loves us, just as we are, no strings attached. It may sound almost too good to be true, but trust me, it's true. As St. Augustine wrote, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us."

In a very real sense, there is only one of us, because each of us is unique. There's not another person on the face of the earth exactly like you or like me. Dr. Rachel Remen says that, after her many years of listening to others, it seems that the essential quality of the human soul is uniqueness. She writes, "Each of us is one of a kind. None of us has existed in the history of the human race before."

In her book, Kitchen Table Wisdom, Dr. Remen shares a story about a prominent CEO who was recovering from prostate cancer. He told Rachel Remen that during a time of meditation, a simple thought occurred to him. "I am me," he thought, and then he said that was followed by a sense of peace and an unfamiliar acceptance of himself as he is. He wrote these words to Dr. Remen: "I am shocked to have discovered this morning that I am the only me there is. I think this is the key to everything...A genuine and not inflated sense of importance and self-value. I've spent most of my life comparing myself to others....Do they sit on more powerful boards? Are they smarter? Do they have more hair? And all the time there is this other way of seeing things....I am handmade. Less than perfect but more a work of creation than a product of technology. And I am not alone in this. Everyone is the only 'me' there is."

Obviously, that was a powerful and life-changing revelation to this CEO, and the same thing can be true for you and me. I am handmade; you are handmade; I am unique and so are you; no two of us are identical. We are each uniquely and wonderfully made. We are God's creation, and we are accepted and loved by God, and what's good enough for God ought to be good enough for us. Right?

In my files, I found a poem. I have no idea where it came from or who wrote it; I only know that it's been around for a while. It's too long to share in its entirety, but it's too appropriate not to share at all. So this is part of the poem entitled, "There's Nobody Just Like Me"

I may be weak.

I may be strong.

I may be right.

I may be wrong.

But there's nobody just like me!

I may be dark.

I may be light.

I may be black.

I may be white...

But there's nobody just like me!

My hair is straight

Or there's a curl.

And I'm a boy

Or I'm a girl...

But there's nobody just like me!

I wear a smile.

I wear a frown.

My eyes are blue.

My eyes are brown...

Oh! There's nobody just like me!

I may be short.

I may be tall.

I'm glad I'm me

And that's not all...

There's no one else that I would rather be---

'Cause there's nobody just like me!

CLOSING:

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that each of us knows at the core of our being that "there's nobody just like me." Just as every fingerprint is different from every other fingerprint, we're all different; we're all unique. Each of us is covered with the fingerprints of God.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.