

Harriett Beecher Stowe was a successful writer. She achieved her first triumph as an author at the age of twelve. She was a student at Litchfield Academy. Along with the other Litchfield students she was required to submit an essay at the end of the term. Her essay was awarded first prize by the unanimous vote of the judges and was one of two read at the graduation exercises by the headmaster, John Brace. So outstanding was her paper, the audience applauded when it was read.

When it was revealed that Harriett Beecher was the author of this paper, her father, a pastor of the local church, smiled proudly. **The smile of her proud father was a reward Harriett cherished as long as she lived.** Her biographer said, *"Neither the honors nor the success she won in later life meant as much to her as her father's smile, and that smile in effect shaped her career."* **Yes, A father's smile--a mother's nod of approval are POWERFUL!!** Deep within the heart of every young person is the need to have a father or a mother say, **Well done. I'm proud of you. You're a good kid!"**

**THE DEEPEST NEED EVERY YOUNG PERSON HAS IS THE NEED TO FEEL ACCEPTED, LOVED, WANTED, APPRECIATED.**

In our lesson for today Mark tells us that at Jesus' baptism he heard the voice of God saying to him, *"You are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased!"*

What a marvelous affirmation! Do you remember Luke's comments about Jesus' younger years, *"...he grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."*?

*I wonder if his mother Mary ever said to Jesus, "You're a bad boy."* I doubt it, don't you? I'm not saying that Jesus did not have a normal childhood. **What I am saying is there were some things Mary believed about Jesus. She knew he was a special child.** He might have been mischievous, rowdy, but he could never have been bad! **I wish every mother and father, and every teacher and coach could believe that about the children in their lives.**

**In his book, MIS-TREATED, Ron Lee Dunn tells about two altar boys. One was born in 1892 in Eastern Europe. The other was born just three years later in a small town in Illinois.** Though they lived very separate lives in very different parts of the world, these two altar boys had almost identical experiences. Each boy was given the opportunity to assist his parish priest in the service of Communion. **Ironically, each boy, while handling the communion cup, accidentally spilled some of the wine on the carpet. There the similarities end.**

The priest in the Eastern European church, seeing the purple stain on the carpet, slapped the little altar boy hard across the face and shouted, *"Clumsy oaf! Leave the altar!"* That little boy grew up to become an atheist and a Communist. He was the strongman dictator of Yugoslavia from 1943 to 1980. **His name was Josip Broz Tito.**

The priest in the church in Illinois, upon seeing the stain near the altar, knelt down to the little boy's level, looked him tenderly in the eyes and said, *"It's all right, son. You'll do better next time. You'll be a fine priest for God someday."* That little boy grew up to become the much-loved Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. Two young boys. Two similar experiences with radically different endings. **We all need to feel loved, accepted, appreciated.**

**This brings us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing to be said: WE BECOME WHAT OTHERS TELL US WE WILL BECOME.** Tell a child that he or she is a good child, praise him for his positive acts, tell her she is pretty and you are proud of her **and he or she will live up to that positive self-image.**

Pablo Picasso once said rather immodestly, *"When I was a child, my mother said to me, 'If you become a soldier you'll be a general. If you become a monk you'll end up as the Pope.' Instead I became a painter and wound up as Picasso."* Whether you appreciate Picasso's art or not you will have to admit he had a wise mother. ***We become what people tell us we will become.*** If people *see a vision of success* for us then success is probably what we will attain.

Each year, in the weeks leading up to Christmas, a great number of people find delight in the marvelous story written by **Charles Dickens: A Christmas Carol**. There is something in the story that lures us back to it year after year; we never seem to grow tired of hearing its message. The main character in the story is a surly old man named Scrooge, who lives a miserly existence. He sees no benefit in being generous with the poor, or even providing a living wage to dedicated workers. He clutches onto his money and despises the thought of parting with any of it. **But it is not only his money that Scrooge withholds from others, it is his entire being. He withholds love and kindness, he withholds warmth and friendship.** Then, one night, Scrooge undergoes a profound crisis. He sees himself through the eyes of others. **He has a vivid vision of his past; and then his present.** But what is most frightful to him - what shakes him to the core of his being - is when he is granted the opportunity of a lifetime. **He is allowed to witness his FUTURE.**

**But his future proves to be so dark and frightening,** that it prompts within him a dramatic change. He undergoes a radical transformation and **becomes** an entirely new person. Rather than being cold and indifferent to people, he **becomes** generous and compassionate.

It is a heart-warming story. But more than that, it is a hopeful story. **IT SHOWS THAT EVEN SCROOGE CAN BECOME WHAT OTHERS BELIEVE HE IS CAPABLE OF...THAT HE CAN BE LOVED, ACCEPTED AND APPRECIATED.**

**WE ALL NEED SOMEONE WHO BELIEVES IN US...SOMEBODY WHO SEES US AS WE COULD BE. We all need to feel loved, accepted, appreciated. We become what significant others tell us we will become. This brings us to our final point.**

**IN ORDER FOR CHILDREN TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES, PARENTS NEED TO LEARN TO SEPARATE THEIR CHILDREN'S DEEDS FROM THEIR WORTH AS HUMAN BEINGS.**

It's not easy being a parent. A mother of three unruly preschoolers was asked whether she'd have children if she had to do it all over again. *"Sure," she responded, "but not the same ones!"*

A famous pediatrician was asked by a mother what the best time was to put her children to bed. *"While you still have the strength," was the answer.*

. It is one thing to say, "Tommy, you have done a bad thing. It is quite another to say, "Tommy, you are a bad boy." A child breaks a dish. Mother comes running with a scowl upon her face. "Naughty girl!" she says loudly. "Shame on you." A few moments later the child is tugging on Mommy's dress. She's looking up into Mommy's face. What she wants to know is, "Am I still loved. I have done something I shouldn't have done. Am I still a person worthy of my mother's love?" A wise mother or father will take the child up into their arms and offer comfort and assurance at this point.

**Here we take our cue from Jesus--for this is what the cross is all about. Because of what Christ has done, our acceptability is separated from our sinful actions.** What else does it mean that our sins have all been washed away?

**It has often been noted that Jesus never called people sinners.** The woman was not an adulteress. She was a person of worth who had committed an adulterous act. The man who stole is not a thief but rather a person of worth who has committed a grievous crime. When we say God loves the sinner but not the sin, we are stating the most foundational truth about the meaning of agape love. It is a truth we need to apply to our lives as families. **Separate the action from the person.**

One last word. Some of us are not parents. There is no one for whom we are responsible to bolster their self-esteem. No, we are not all parents, **BUT WE ARE ALL CHILDREN. Some of us bear scars from our own upbringing.**

Arturo Toscanini, as a child, never knew whether or not his mother loved him. When he grew up and received the acclaim of vast audiences everywhere, he still felt this gnawing emptiness, this chasm in his soul. He could never be sure that his success brought any joy or comfort to his mother's heart.

In Faye Welden's book, FEMALE FRIENDS, one woman expresses relief that her mother has died, saying that now there is one less pair of eyes to judge her.

**Maybe that is your experience.** Perhaps there were significant others who somehow communicated to you once upon a time that you were stupid, ugly, unacceptable.

**Or perhaps you have let yourself down.** There was an occasion or perhaps several occasions when you fell into a grievous sin. You are coping with guilt, with the fear of discovery, or the regret of having hurt people you love. Now you are sorry. You can't change the past, you are seeking to change the future. The past still haunts you, though.

**I want you to look into the eyes of a man who hangs on a cross--eyes filled with forgiveness, renewal and love.** Eyes that see you but not your sin. It makes a difference whether you once told a lie or that you are a liar. It makes a difference whether you once broke your marriage vows or you are an adulterer. It makes a difference whether you once cheated on your taxes or that you are a cheat. Unfortunately, there are some people who continue in this behavior until they actually become a liar, a cheat, or an adulterer. **But it doesn't have to be that way.** At the foot of the cross there is hope. He is able to separate our worth as a child of God from our bad deeds.

A little child broke a vase that was a cherished heirloom. Because she knew its value, the child cried out when she broke it. Her mother came running. The child was surprised to see not anger but relief on her mother's face. *"I thought you were hurt,"* her mother said, gathering her into arms. Looking back on that event later she *said "I discovered that day that I was the family treasure."* – If only every child could grow up with that kind of feeling. ***"I AM THE FAMILY TREASURE."***

**We all need to feel loved, accepted, valued.**

**Unfortunately, more of us become what people tell us we will become.**

**The wise parent separates a child's actions from his or her value as a person.**

And because of that ACT, we learn that God VALUES US. He is able to separate us from our SIN.

**Thus, EACH DAY HE CLEANS US AND HELPS US TO START ANEW. Amen.**