

CHRIST CHURCH BEACON – October 18, 2009
Bible Text: Ephesians 2:8-10 & Matthew 10:29-31
Title: You're Important to God

I. Introduction

Years ago, a missionary was returning to the U.S. after many years abroad in the mission field. Among the passengers on the ship was a very well-known celebrity. When the ship docked in New York, there was a crowd of people and many reporters on hand to greet the celebrity. As the celebrity came down the gangplank, cameras were flashing and there was quite a bit of excitement. The missionary felt small and insignificant by comparison. Being a good Christian, he took his concern to God in prayer. He prayed:

“O God, I’ve spent my life serving you and helping others, yet there was nobody on the dock to greet me – nobody! This celebrity received so much attention when he came home, and I got none.”

To which God answered: “You’re not home yet.” That missionary may have been considered a nobody in the eyes of the world, yet he was somebody to the Person who matters most, God. And when he eventually arrived at his heavenly home, I’m sure he was greeted more enthusiastically than he could ever imagine.

You and I are very special to God as well, not just because of what we’ve done, but because God loves us as his own. This week’s lesson in our Thursday evening “Fearless” study had to do with a type of fear we usually don’t think about. It is the fear of not mattering, the fear of insignificance. This fear may not grip us like other fears that can cause worry, stress, anxiety, and even despair. But the fear of insignificance can influence how we think and act.

II. We Long to Be Important

As human beings, it is in our nature to want to be or feel important, to matter. We like it when somebody calls us “sir” or “madam”. I remember the first time somebody referred to me as Mr. Beck – I felt like I was finally grown up and somebody of importance.

We like being waited on in a restaurant – the more attentive the service, the more important we feel – and the bigger the tip we’ll leave. We like being in a hotel where people wait on us, and even bring breakfast to our room (for an exorbitant price).

We hate flying because we are herded like cattle into crowded airplanes where they don’t even feed us any more. We envy those well-off enough to fly first class or business class – those people are important, they get the best service. Everybody wants to be somebody.

1. IBM Manager

For example, what used to be the desire of every young employee of IBM? It was to eventually become a manager – then you’ve arrived. As an IBM manager, you were among the elite, you had influence, and your talents and accomplishments were finally

recognized. You were invited to meetings, and you had people reporting to you. Your name appeared on organization charts – now you were *Somebody!*

2. Job = Identity

Of course the desire of IBM employees today is just to keep the job they have – forget about advancement or pay raises. Losing your job is not only difficult economically, but it can also be a blow psychologically. For many people, their identity is tied to their job. When we meet someone for the first time, often one of the first questions we ask is, “What do you do?” Even if you’re laid off for strictly economic reasons, you may see it as “I don’t matter”, “I’m expendable”, or “I’m useless.” We might have feelings of emptiness and insignificance until we are eventually hired by somebody – then we feel useful and important again.

3. Other Things We Do

We often do things to try to seem important, and to broadcast to the world that we matter. We live in a house we can’t afford, and we buy a car that is much too expensive. Look at the number of luxury brands: Mercedes, BMW, Lexus, Infiniti, Audi, Volvo, Saab, Cadillac, Buick, Lincoln, Acura, and high-end models. The market for such expensive cars is big enough that all of these brands can survive.

We buy the latest fashions to show that we’re “with it”, not wearing something is “So last year.” We’ll exaggerate our accomplishments and Google ourselves to see if we rate a spot on the Internet. The problem is, even if we do have great worldly accomplishments, the sense of satisfaction they give is fleeting. Even if we are important, wealthy, and even famous, we spend a lot of time worrying about losing it, as Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 (NIV):

What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

III. God Values Us

What’s the answer then? How do we overcome this fear of insignificance? We find the answer in God, and this happens in a number of different ways:

1. Our Position in God

First of all, we find significance from our position in God as the pinnacle of God’s creation. Every single human being matters to God, as illustrated by Jesus in the Gospel lesson for today (in Matthew 10:29-31, NRSV):

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

God created us, loves us, and is interested in us, as we read in today's psalm (Psalm 139:13-16, NRSV)

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

By the way, the version of this psalm that we read from the hymnal mistranslated verse 14. It should say what I just read: "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

As the peak of God's creation, we read in Genesis that humankind was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28, NRSV):

Then God said, "Let us make humankind *in our image, according to our likeness*; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."
So God created humankind *in his image, in the image of God* he created them; male and female he created them.
God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

There are various opinions concerning what "image of God" means, but the important thing is that we aren't just more highly evolved animals. We have characteristics that are unique and divine in origin, making us very important to God. God created us specifically to have a relationship with him – that's how important we are to God.

2. Our Position in Christ

Secondly, we derive significance from our position in Christ. Jesus died so that you and I can have that relationship with God in this life, and spend eternity in the presence of Almighty God in the hereafter. Although God loves all humankind, those who have trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior are considered children of God. Referring to Jesus, the Apostle John wrote in his Gospel (John 1:12-13):

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. NRSV

The Apostle Paul said something similar in Ephesians 1:5-6a (NRSV):

[God] destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us.

The word “adoption” is used because although God created us, we remained separated from him because of our sinfulness. When we have been cleansed placing our faith in Jesus’ work on the Cross, we are eligible to be adopted by God. This makes us very special, even if we’re considered nobodies by the world.

3. Doing God’s Work

Third, we find significance in the work we do in obedience to God’s call. It is satisfying to do a job well, either at work or at home. However, it is many times more gratifying to be obedient to God by doing the work he has called us to do. We’re so important to God that he planned things for us to do before we were even born! We read in Ephesians 2:10 (NIV):

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Psalm 139:15-16 (NRSV) says something similar:

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

Just think, God was with you *in utero*, with plans already in place for you. Although we have the free will and can reject God’s plans and do our own thing, why would we want to? It is much more fulfilling to be in God’s will than be outside of it.

Although the following verse was written concerning the Israelites, I believe we can apply it to individuals as well. It is one of my favorite verses, which gave me comfort when I was in the process of losing my job in 1984 (Jeremiah 29:11, NRSV):

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

It gives us tremendous comfort that God has plans for us – good plans for our welfare – and this should give us hope and freedom from fear.

IV. Conclusion

While the fear of not mattering isn’t usually uppermost in our thoughts, it is always present in the background. It influences our self-esteem and can drive our actions.

There is the risk that fear of not mattering can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that will pull you down if you let it. That's why we should always keep in mind the words of Psalms 100:3-5:

Know that the LORD is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.
For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations. NRSV

Amen.

Readings:

Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
NIV

Matthew 10:29-31

[Jesus was speaking to his disciples and said to them:]
“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” NRSV