**Coronado Community Church**

*Beyond the Boundaries* - “Born Worthy”

Philippians 1:21-30

A sermon by Pastor Eric Smith

September 24, 2023

I am grateful both to and for George Bruce and Pastor Steve Mather for giving their time and sharing their preaching talent for us these last two weeks.

Karen and I had a renewing time away. We stayed in a cabin not far from Bryce Canyon and Zion National Park at Lake Panguitch. It was beautiful. Serene. When we weren’t gazing out over the lake and surrounding mountains we went fishing. It was relaxing and fun.

After we were there for a week I realized I had no more sermons planned for when we got back. The result of the realization is this three week series of sermons called *Beyond the Boundaries.*

Beyond the Boundaries pushes past the edge of our faith … the boundary lines. Our notions of where those lines are shift from person to person, but not too much. We people of Judeo-Christian heritage have diverse, but still similar perceptions of where the outer edge lies. I hope, in these three sermons, to take us to those boundaries and go gracefully beyond.

Today’s installment is, *Born Worthy.*

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to churches he started while he was in prison. He had time to think about what he wanted to share with them. The letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, were all written by Paul from prison. They promote ideas of liberation.

From today’s passage we focus on this theme…

*live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*

What constitutes a worthy manner of living? What constitutes a worthy life? What is *worth?*

Let’s start with definition. *Worth* is …

*the value of someone;*

*the level at which someone or something deserves to be valued or rated.*

When we were driving to and returning from Lake Panguitch we stopped overnight with friends in Las Vegas. I had never been to the strip and Karen hadn’t been there for many years so we went out to dinner and drove the strip on a Saturday night. What a sight that was. We had plenty of time to look because the boulevard became a parking lot.

I was amazed by the people… how they were dressed. The locals who were out on Saturday night wore black. Tourists wore everything you can imagine that was reasonably comfortable at 90 degrees temperature. Sometimes covering most of the body… sometimes not. Who were they dressing for? Themselves, of course … but there were values and cultures represented in the cowboy boots, the sparkly sequins, the NFL jerseys, and the Hawaiian shirts.

We know what we do and do not want to look like. It’s about appearances! Appearance is a factor that contributes to how we feel about ourselves. We dress like we want, but mostly we dress for others. We want others to experience us as worthy people so we dress to impress or, at least, to fit in with the ones we want to be identified with. It helps our sense of our self-worth. That’s just an example.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), your self-worth is *your evaluation of yourself as a capable and valuable human being deserving of consideration and respect.*Self-worth is our internal sense of being good enough and worthy of love and belonging from others.

Having low self-worth, on the other hand, means judging ourselves harshly: having a low opinion of myself, and tending to focus on my mistakes and shortcomings, rather than my abilities and strengths.

In the Gospel of Luke (chapter 7) there is a story about Jesus and a Roman military officer.

Jesus was told about the Roman military officer’s slave, who was ill and in need of healing. The officer asked through intermediaries if Jesus would come and heal his slave.

Jesus was on his way to the home when the officer sent word that he didn’t need to come, the officer considered himself *not worthy* to have Jesus come into his home… his words. The rest of the message was, *just speak the word and it will be done*.

Jesus found the officer’s faith to be a blessing – and he said so – and the slave was healed.

Consider these couple of verses:

*…some Jewish elders went to Jesus on behalf of the officer, and asked him to come and heal the officer’s slave.*

*4When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, “****He is worthy of having you do this for him****…*

Later on in the passage, when Jesus was on his way to the officer’s house, the officer said,

***I am not worthy …therefore I did not presume to come to you…***

The others thought he was worthy … but the officer didn’t think so of himself.

Who decides your worth? Lots of people do… but the only one whose opinion shapes your life and your sense of your worth is you. You can create outer appearances so that others will think of you as a worthy person – we all do that at some time - and that can be alright, but it isn’t alright when you create an outer appearance that isn’t congruent with the inner “you.”

Except for Halloween.

Sometimes we give up our own decision making about our sense of worth and let others decide it for us. That might have a short term reward, but in the long run it is trouble.

One of the influences on our *concepts of worth* is the Bible… or, more correctly, some things purported to be the teaching of the Bible.

Many of the ideas called *Biblical Truth* that have been passed down to us were formed centuries ago. Let me name one… and it’s a big one. The idea of Original Sin. People still hold onto it. It serves no good purpose.

The weight of this teaching – and these kinds of teachings - and our approach to them - has changed. We no longer think people are born in sin. They are born in love. God is love… we’re created in the image of God… *God created life and God called all the Creation good.*

There’s a worthiness in that. Creation is good… all of life is good.

You were born good. You were born worthy.

The ancient Hebrews believed that birth defects and disease was due to inherited sin. That bad karma was passed along from generation to generation. (They might not have said *karma*, but it gets the meaning across)

Jesus spoke to this issue. It’s in John Chapter 9. He was walking along with his disciples when they saw a man who had been born blind.

His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

*“Neither he nor his parents sinned,”* Jesus answered, *“He was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”*

He was born worthy. God’s child.

*You were born so that the works of God might be displayed in you.*

You were born worthy, too. God’s child.

But life happens.

If you were fortunate in early life you were surrounded by people who contributed to your sense of worthiness through their love and care. But there is a wide range of possibility. If you were not as fortunate, the folks around you didn’t make a strong a contribution to your sense of worthiness. You had to find it elsewhere. Some folks are better at this in life than others.

Whether you were fortunate or not in having a nurturing community around you are your circumstances. They may have been tough, not conducive to a sense of worthiness; but you still get to choose your worth for yourself.

There were two brothers who lived in eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century. Agrarian culture. They were teenagers. They decided, for whatever stupid reason, to steal a sheep from a neighboring farm and they did, but they were caught. Penalties were severe in those days. The penalty for sheep stealing was to be branded with the initials S-T on your forehead. That’s what happened to both of those boys.

From that day on, anytime they looked another person face-to-face the awful truth was revealed… sheep thief.

Not long after one of the boys couldn’t face the judgement and the shame any longer. He killed himself.

Years passed… the surviving boy became a man and tried to conduct himself in a worthy manner.

Decades later two little boys were talking together about this old man they had seen. One asked the other about the scars on his forehead… those initials … S and T… what did they mean?

The second boy replied, *I don’t know for sure, but I think they stand for saint.”*

Here’s another worthy story…

Philippa was a hospice nurse. She worked at a county hospital. A patient she was helping to care for had been brought to the hospital under guard from the local prison. Bill was forty-one years old, serving a long sentence for armed robbery, and dying from complications of HIV and hepatitis C. He had not wanted his mother to visit, because he was so ashamed of his life. But Philippa saw beneath his shame. After a heartfelt conversation, she convinced him to make contact with his mother. Several days later his mother arrived, eighty-three years old, frail … with a grief stricken expression.

When Bill’s mother entered the room, she saw her son, who had not spoken to her for years, in prison garb, handcuffed to the bed. Philippa was afraid that the dignified and stern mother would look at her son with judgment and disappointment. Instead, she just stood there with a deep stillness and they looked each other all over. Then their eyes locked and all the circumstances and sufferings, the roles and veneers, all dropped away. Bill’s mother gazed at her son like a newborn child, like a saint witnessing a miracle, with the heart of all mothers. Bill and his mother each saw their deep connection, their original goodness; worthy, forgiving, eternal. They sat together for an hour and held hands. There was not much that needed to be said. When his mother left, Bill said *now I can die in peace*.

Here is the truth that we’re looking for *Beyond the Barriers*…

Once you accept *your own essential worthiness*,

the worthiness of your birthright,

you cannot help but see the worthiness of every other human.

Here’s your assignment… After you leave today, and all through the week… when you look at people… friends, family, strangers… pause and really take them in. Lock into that person you see… and speak to your inner self… *that person… was born worthy.*

Try that for a while and see what happens to you.