

Good Morning-

I am so excited to be here today and share a favorite Christmas Carol with all of you!!

This is the last Sunday in our series we call Carols...Why we sing the songs we sing.

Our theme today is found in the lyric of oh Holy Night.

We know that because Jesus was born, our souls can feel their worth.

The first lines may be familiar-

O Holy Night

The stars are brightly shining

It is the night of our Savior's birth

Long lay the world in sin and error pining

'Til He appeared and

the soul felt Its worth

I love Christmas Carols. When my girls were younger, we would spend most of December practicing for a local production of the Best Christmas pageant ever.

If you have not read the book, or seen the play or movie- it is the story of a family called the Herdman's who were far from God, but through a performance of the Luke 2 story about the birth of Jesus in a little church pageant, they learned the most important thing any of us can know- Jesus was born for us.

My youngest daughter Emily was Gladys Herdman one year. She came out with messy hair wearing the angel costume and got to say the most important line in the play; in the way only a 5 year old could say it

Hey, Hey- unto you a child is bo-ren.

That is the good news and why we are here today- Jesus was born for us!!

When we believe this, our souls feel their worth.

What does that mean? I hope that you leave here today knowing that Disciples of Christ are simply people who believe that we are who God says we are. When our identity is -Loving follower of Jesus- we are beginning to understand the worth of our soul.

How do you care for your soul? Do you enjoy rest ?

I have my first vacation since I started serving as Executive Pastor on the week between Christmas and New Years'.

I am so excited to watch some Netflix shows I have stored away to binge watch- I have only seen a few minutes of Gilmore Girls and have saved the whole season on This is US.... but I am most excited

to Read. I love to read and one of my favorite authors is Lysa Terkeurst. Many of my thoughts today come from her book "Uninvited". She says

The only way to feel the worth of our soul is to have an intimacy based identity.

I think we know this deep inside. And so we wrongly look for a person...someone, anyone- to be the intimate relationship that we base our identity on. But there is no human who is able to fill the hole in our soul that only God can fill.

There is no relationship, outside of our intimate relationship with God that can truly allow our soul to feel its worth.

No one else can fill God's space in our soul, not a spouse, a child, a boss, a teacher, or anyone that we give access to our soul...

All of us are broken and we will say and do things that can injure each.

If we are honest, all of us sit here today and our souls have been injured at one point in our lives.

Along our path have been people who hurt us.

Maybe the rejection happened to you on the playground as a child. Or as you got older, someone said something that wasn't true and you believed them. Whenever it happened you've allowed your mind to think over and over about that word or action. Maybe you were called stupid or fat, ugly or a loser. And once that word made its way into your soul, you have struggled to shake free ever since.

I know that is true of much of my life. I can see looking back on my life that God created me in advance to the things He is calling me to do. But somewhere between 1st grade and college, I lost so much of what makes me, me. I had a lot of acne as a teen, and was surrounded by very skinny friends, so I saw myself as ugly and fat. I grew up in Lowell, and when I was younger most people were born and raised in one area..Pawtucketville, Christian Hill.. but my family was very poor and we moved around a lot- so I had to make new friends every few years. We even moved during the winter of my freshman year of high school, so for much of high school -I felt alone. When I went to college, I was able to "reinvent " myself...and I think the true parts of who I am began to shine.

I am thankful that I am emotionally healthier now and find my identity in Christ, so that I can help my girls find their worth, not in what others say- but in what God says-

His words to them are His words to all of us.

You are loved.

The resulting hurt of any form of rejection can linger and entangle us from moving forward if we don't put it behind us.

But God is good, and He is good all the time.

Paul in Ephesians 3:18-19 says

18 may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

If we could look outside of time – into our life we might see that someone calls us something that wasn't true. And how we may have allowed that lie to direct our path.

The lie they said, becomes the label we wear today,

Someone said to us with their action or words or both...you are not accepted you are not loved...and to this day-the label we wear is "unloved". And we think that we are not worthy of love.

Then the lie reaches into our soul, and we begin to doubt the love of God. BUT THE TRUTH IS we are His beloved-

Christ came for one reason. To reconcile us to His Father the God who made us, and loves us and has a great plan for us.

The gospel is this-you are loved.

No matter what you've said or what you done. No matter what has been said about you...or what has been done to you... the forgiving power of the blood of Jesus has paid in full any word, thought, or deed-contrary to the will of God... that is what sin is. You are not rejected by God!!!

Don't allow a lie to become a label

Believe what God says- You are loved!!

Rejection steals the best of who I am, by reinforcing the worst of what has been said to me or done to me.

The lie Satan wants us to believe is that we are not who God says we are. This lie goes all the way back to Genesis. We started our year in Gen 1- and saw that when God created the world it was "Tov" – which means all things working as they were created to be.

But when sin entered our world, it broke the goodness of God's design. All creation is now groaning and waiting to be restored. That is the new City we find in the Book of Revelation – the last book in the Bible.

God made a perfect world, sin destroyed it.

BUT... God set in place a way to reconcile us to Him.

God and man are reconciled...Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

So what does it look like when our souls feel their worth?

Have you ever had a moment when your body felt its worth? I am not a runner, but many of my friends are. They run marathons and 10k's all the time. I can't imagine how it feels to finish that- But I know how excited I was ***not to come in last*** when I ran my first 5 K. But nothing compares to a day at my gym about 2 years ago. I started attending the gym I go to in the fall of 2104. My oldest daughter had left for college and the President of her University encouraged the parents to find something to fill the time left by the absence of our kids. My husband and I used to go to another local gym, and I would go a couple of times a month and walk on a treadmill. I was not getting stronger. My first class at our new gym was a kickboxing class. After the class, we had to push our bag back and I was so weak, I could not move boxing bag an inch. But I did not quit and a few months later in a boot camp class I pushed it across the floor and back. I felt so strong. I was almost in tears I was so full of joy. I can't explain it any other way than my body felt its worth.

That is what I feel like in my soul when I see people I have invested in taking steps to share God's love with someone else. God has shaped me to be a developer- to see how people have been gifted and my joy comes when I see others using the gifts God gave them.

Just like the gym was hard and scary for me, it is hard and scary for us the first or second or third time we step out in faith and do that thing God has asked us to do. - Is scary and hard. But when God has created us in advance to do these hard things and we do them- we feel alive.

To do the things that bring our soul to life involves Faith

Hebrews 11 says.

11:1 Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.

3 By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.

No one can soar to the place where there soul feels its worth unless we daily meet with Jesus -we were created to be with God...To live with and love the one who made us.

How do we do this? How do we put God first? It is so hard isn't it?

I Honestly struggle myself-In the business of taking on these new roles at Harbor I have allowed other things to keep me from being still and listening, and believing that what God says is true. So that is what I am working on as I care for my soul. I am learning how to be still and silent- to pray.

Maybe some of you are like me. Things that make us anxious occur and we think you've prayed about things, but really what we do is we worry about them, Talk to other people about them; try to figure out everything on our own. Prayer is a conversation- asking, and listening. I think our soul feels it's worth when we delight in the Lord

Psalms 37:4 Says

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

I believe that is because more time we spend with God the more we want what he wants.

In Mark chapter 3:14-15 we see Jesus choose 12 people to become his followers

He has two reasons for doing this

1. That they would become his regular companions Jesus, like each of us needed friends- we were not created to do life alone.
2. And then- when they knew who they were- friends of God- they would preach and drive out demons...

Their identity wasn't in what they did... He always intended they would first know they were the loved friends of Jesus.

Do you forget? I know I do...I forget to be with Jesus; before I serve him... he cares more for our Heart, than our hands.

God believes that you are important. You are known and you are loved. It can be difficult to see outside of our current circumstances and beyond our human limitations. But God has promised us we are not alone. He has come- to save our souls.

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining

It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!

We find our hope and promise in Jesus Christ, Immanuel- God is with us. That is why we celebrate at Christmas... because the birth of Jesus, and because he lived a sinless life and on the cross, God's redeeming work was done. He defeated death and sits at God's right hand interceding for you and me.

Long lay the world in sin and error pining

Our thoughts, words and deed that separate us from a perfect God have been covered by the blood of Christ. This is such good news. It is why we are renting the CHS auditorium; we want to invite the people you love to join us and celebrate.

Till he appear'd and the soul felt its worth.

THIS LINE- changed me We want people far from God to find their way back to Him. That our souls would feel their worth.

Till he appear'd and the soul felt its worth.

A few years ago I went to an early Christmas service at MCC in Manchester NH I have heard this song sung every year for decades- but the line spoke to my soul that night and I heard it for the first time. Every time I am in that space, I pray for those I love who are far from God.. Who do not understand His great love for us I think many of us today have people we love who struggle. If we could get to the root of the pain that is covered up with depressions, anxiety, addiction and selfishness- I think we would find a soul that does not know its worth.

Our worth is found in one place.

At the manger- where God sent his son, not to come as a king- but to come as a servant. These words show us what worship is...

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices

For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!

Fall on your knees

Oh hear the angel voices

I loved when Mike showed us a few weeks ago that we can find out what they Angels were singing- Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty-

We see the angels sing in the passage in Luke 2

Luke 2:8-14

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

We end this year in the book of Revelation. This last book of scripture is often seen as hard to read, or scary and difficult. In it- John- one of those 12 friends Jesus called to preach and drive out demons gets a glimpse into eternity. John sees God pull back the curtain of time and God allows John to see- outside of time what God is doing and what He has done and He will do.

We have no reason to fear. God is with us!!

Scripture shows us the truth...God sits on the throne and that the Lamb of God, Jesus, has paid for every sin. He is a gentle savior.

But we have our own free will. We can we choose to reject him-God has given us that right.

Revelation shows us that one day, all of creation must stand before the Almighty God who was, and is, and is to come. And when that day occurs who can stand?

NO one.

Whether you are a Powerful king or a ruler –or anyone with the power to injure another soul with your words or actions... one day we all will come face-to-face with God. Nothing but the blood of Jesus be enough

Oh night divine

Oh night when Christ was born

Christ has come.

This Christmas, sit by the tree.. and allow the world to be still and remember this.

Immanuel- God is with you!

Let your soul feel its worth. Listen to the whisper of God's Love to your soul. You are loved.

I want to finish today with a final verse from o Holy night

Truly He taught us to love one another

His law is love and His gospel is peace

Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother

And in His name all oppression shall cease

Is your soul in so much pain this week as we look at Aleppo, or a neighbor or someone you love in pain.

The Google video of 2016 google searches showed the video that you might remember of the little boy in an ambulance in Syria, he was in shock, and covered in blood. and when you looked at him, did you think..

Why does God let innocent people suffer?

How can I respond to the injustice I see in this world?

What can I do?

We can something, we can do one thing.

Love one another

Truly He taught us to love one another

And in His name all oppression shall cease

We can fight for justice, trust in God's power and Sovereignty, For **in His name all oppression shall cease**

Care for your neighbor, love the person who so hard to love. Not in your own strength... but by the power of the mighty God we serve

About a month ago I met a sweet woman who is part of two local churches. She came to my office on a Friday when I was so very tired. I had been doing many things in my own strength. But how he loves us so!! God was about to show me what He would do **through me with His power**. She told me of some refugee families that had just come to Lowell. And as she told me about the mom and dad and the children in each family...the only way I can describe how I felt is to say I felt the worth of their souls. My heart was overwhelmed. But my body was tired.

I knew God wanted me to do something.

What I learned is he never asks me to do everything.

I made a simple Facebook post one Friday morning. Two hours later I had to tell people to stop offering things...As people begin to bring things to my home, I filled up my car with 2 car loads of things ... people went to stores and bought strangers new blankets... it was like the worth of the soul of these refugees had been felt by my friends. And as I looked at these bags and bags of items - I started to become afraid. I thought how will I ever get all these things to the right people?

But I didn't have to worry.

I simply had to ask for others to come alongside me, friends came and sorted clothes, Harbor- as a church, you are so generous!! Teams came to deliver the clothes.

Today, I'm overwhelmed by the generosity and love that people have for one another.

I was also reminded the God never asks me to be God. He asks me to be faithful... when I overdo and get exhausted and do not rest... my soul does not feel it's worth...

We began today with a reminder- Our Soul can feel its worth. In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul reminds his friends to grasp that they are holy, Loved people. Listen to this prayer Paul wrote- it is for you and me today as well.

Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Growth

14 When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father

15 the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.

16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.

17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

When we trust him and believe what he says, we can proclaim the gospel O Holy night when Jesus Christ was born ...in our sin we felt alone, but He appeared and our soul felt its worth. Let's finish our final Sunday in our Garden to City series with a scripture from the book of Revelation.

Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,

Let all within us praise His holy name

The Message Rev 19:4b Hallelujah!

5From the Throne came a shout, a command:

Praise our God, all you his servants,

All you who fear him, small and great!

6-8Then I heard the sound of massed choirs, the sound of a mighty cataract, the sound of strong thunder:

Hallelujah!

The Master reigns,

our God, the Sovereign-Strong!

Let us celebrate, let us rejoice,

let us give him the glory!

Leave today knowing you are made in the image of God your soul is made to feel its worth. One day in the new Jerusalem, God will wipe away every tear.. because he loves you.

When we feel the worth of our soul, we will be able to see the worth of each other. That is how people will find their way back to God.

When they are seen, prayed for, loved and told of the God who made them and has a great plan for them, their souls and our souls will feel their worth.

How are you feeling today? Do you need to rest in the love of Jesus? Are there things you are doing that someone else can and should be doing? Maybe in the quiet of this day you can ask God for wisdom, or for people to come alongside you.

Leave today knowing who you are, the loved child of God. Breathe in the love of God, but don't hyperventilate. Don't keep it all in. Find a way to breathe out...to help the souls around you understand their worth.

I love that I live near MCC and often go on Thursday nights. This week their Pastor has such a good reminder of how we can take a faith filled step to help our soul feel its worth.

Ask God for His help to take a next step

1. If you have never made that first choice to ask Jesus to be the Lord of your life, what a beautiful time to do so- Christmas...it is simple..

Romans 10:9 New Living Translation (NLT)

9 If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

If you want someone to pray that with you today, our team would love to pray with you.

Stop at the welcome table and they will find a person to pray with you.

2. Maybe you have taken the first step and this Christmas God is asking you to believe Him..not the lies or labels that have defined you- Believe the truth- your soul has worth.

Ask for His strength to take time to read His word, Hide His word in your heart and do what He says. If you read scripture and find it hard, ask God to open the eyes of your heart so you can understand the words.

Next year we will spend much of the winter with a focus on how we can all take a step closer to Christ.

But today, Listen to the truth. Believe what God says, not the loud lies that try to tear the worth from your soul. Write it down and read it over and over or sing it over and over until you believe it.

3. Slow Down. A rushed soul is slowly dying. We are created to rest. To sit still is so hard- but we can learn to do it.

Psalm 46: 10,11

Be still, and know that I am God!

I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.

The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.

Leave today proclaiming the good news-

Christ is born for us. He appeared and our soul felt its worth.

Will you pray with me?

God I want your truth to be the loudest voice in my life.

May your word correct me, comfort me, and remind me... that when I am still I can hear your still small voice... help me to trust you.. To believe you.

Lord we take this moment and cry out to you for the souls of those we love who are far from you. Will you wrap them in your love Help them to know that you are for them, you love them.

Help us to be an encourager for someone else, even if we feel discouraged. Help us to be generous with our time, talent and treasure- even if we feel we do not have enough resources. Your word says – Give and it will be given to you, pressed down and in full measure. Help us to believe what you say.

Thank you Jesus for coming to our world...and for allowing our soul to feel its worth because of your great love. Amen