

Renewing The Mind #2

Romans 12:2e

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Have you trouble with self-worth? Do you ever think you are no use, you are really worth nothing, and you can't do anything? Do you ever think that of all the people in this room who think that, you are sure you are the least valuable one? That is what everybody today calls a problem with self-image or self-esteem.

You know as well as I do, there are all kinds of seminars and conferences and meetings to try to deal with that problem. It just seems that the only answer to it that really matters is not what this psychiatrist or that psychologist or this writer or that counsellor says, but it seems that the important thing is what the Person, who made us, our Creator, thinks about the whole problem of self-image.

In a way today is a good day to deal with it, to see what our God says about this business of self-esteem and self-worth, because this is Palm Sunday. It is the day when we remember that great public event when the Creator of the universe seemed to acknowledge a certain man as being the Messiah, the one all the Jewish nation had looked forward to for years.

He seemed to acknowledge that this man was the Messiah by giving him a public, triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. It was a time when people waved palm branches in the air and threw palm branches before Jesus on the ground and welcomed him into Jerusalem as the king. The record of it is in John 12:12: "The next day a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'" Not great press coverage really, when you think of it--two verses. It is true that Matthew, Mark and Luke did a little better; they did it in about ten or twelve verses.

It is very interesting, as you read those accounts--do you feel the same as I do, that it is a kind of anti-climax? It seems as if the people involved are trying to force the principal in the whole incident to make a public proclamation of his real, true position as the Messiah before all the eyes and ears of the world, so that he will once and for all establish his esteem and respect in everybody's eyes. You keep feeling that the principal in the whole thing, Jesus, is backing off like mad and playing it very, very cool and low key.

It all contrasts with the entrance of a Roman general. He enters with a huge army behind him, his relatives in the chariot with him, slaves going before him, with everybody cheering and the banners out. And here is Jesus coming in sitting on a donkey. You get that feeling of schizophrenia, don't you? Somebody is trying to push him up to proclaim himself king before the eyes of everybody in the world, and he, himself, is playing it very, very quiet.

It was true, there was a prophecy in Zechariah and John quotes it in verse 14: "And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it; as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on an ass's colt!'" But actually his followers left out one of the biggest words in that prophecy which was "humble"--"Behold, you king comes, humble." They left that out and concentrated on trying to use this to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah before the eyes and ears of the

world, so that at last he would get the esteem and respect that was due him.

The truth is that that is not the way self-esteem is established. It is not the way self-worth is established--by getting everybody else to respect you. Actually the moment when Jesus' value and significance was established was not that great public moment of acclamation before all those people. The moment actually occurred several years before, and miles from that big city of Jerusalem. It occurred on the bank of a river when Jesus went under the water of the Jordan and came up and a voice said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Loved ones, that is actually where self-esteem and self-worth come from. They don't come from all the crowds in the world saying you are great. They come from you knowing that the God who made you loves you, knows you and has put you here to do something unique for him in his world, and that he will receive you to himself after you have done it. This is what gives a person self-esteem and self-worth.

But John Hinckley didn't believe that at all and doesn't today. John Hinckley is sure that now thousands of people know who John Hinckley is. [attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan in 1981] He is expecting to begin to experience some of the benefits of a real feeling of self-worth and self-esteem, because he knows that not only Jodie Foster, the film star, but his parents and his sister, certainly Reagan and all the rest of us, and all his friends at school who for years thought of him as an unimportant non-entity, will now know who John Hinckley is.

It is interesting, isn't it, that as far as we know, nothing matters to that dear guy but the fact, the idea, that at last he has self-esteem, at last he has self-worth, at last people know who John Hinckley is. Attempting to kill a president, paralyzing Brady for life, imprisonment, even danger of execution, nothing matters in his mind beside the fact that now everybody knows who John Hinckley is.

Now, loved ones, where does such a mania for attention come from? I think all of us see the ridiculousness of it. The guy has spoiled his whole life and the lives of others and yet he feels, "Yes, but people know me now!" Where has that mania come from? Now I want to say this gently to you, but really it comes from the way millions of families in our dear nation live. It does. It comes from the way thousands of parents think; it comes from the way thousands of our schools operate and it comes from the way thousands of us live day by day.

It comes from the belief that your self-worth is established by what others think of you. That's it. That is the heresy and the deception at the bottom of it all--that our self-worth, our self-esteem, our personal value and our personal significance in this world comes from what other people think of us. You'll see it here. Time magazine writes this and I think probably we will all agree with it, "John Jr. was Jack and JoAnn Hinckley's last child. He was born on May 29, 1955, in the southern Oklahoma town of Ardmore, where his father worked as a petroleum engineer. Two years later Hinckley Sr. took a job in Dallas, 100 miles south. (Then it begins, and you will see it.) "The growing family was good-looking, and healthy and Protestant. All five settled down to life in University Park, a moneyed Dallas suburb of broad lawns and handsome homes. The Hinckleys are" (even this is part of it) "'a fine Christian family', according to one friend, and regular churchgoers; it was fitting that their first home in Dallas was a former parsonage. Scott, now 32, ever the good eldest child, sought and won parental approbation; Diane, now 28," (and this is it)" was exceptionally blond and pretty in a neighborhood of blond, pretty little girls; and John, never a problem, joined the Y.M.C.A.'s Indian Guides and distinguished himself in grammar school sports. Recalls Jim

Francis, John's basketball coach for three years during elementary school: 'He was a beautiful looking little boy, a wonderful athlete, really a leader. He was the best basketball player on the team'. It just goes on--"In 1966 the Hinckleys traded up: they moved to Highland Park, the neighborhood-of-choice for haute Dallas. The house on Beverly Drive where John Jr. spent the years of his adolescence is large, with a sweeping circular driveway in front and a swimming pool out back. He was not a troublesome teen-ager or even a loner. Indeed, in the seventh and ninth grades he was elected president of his home room, and as an eighth grader managed the basketball team. "John Hinckley was no aloof oddball then," says his junior high friend Kirk Dooley: "No one rooted louder than Hinckley for the Highland Park Red Raiders. In the fall of 1970, John Jr. began classes at Highland Park High School, where his sister was a senior." (And this is the epitome of it, you know.) "That year Diane Hinckley apparently burst forth as a campus star; she performed in a school operetta, she was head cheerleader, homecoming queen candidate, and vice president of the choir, member of both the student council and the A-students' National Honor Society. There are at least ten pictures of her in the yearbook, which cited her as one of the class's eight 'favorites'. She was a formidable sibling presence for sophomore John. During his junior year John was a member of the civic affairs club, and as a senior he was in the Rodeo Club, which organized barbecues, square dances, and junkets to rodeos. In his yearbook John's roster of activities was scanty but unembarrassing, just as his senior-picture hair length seemed perfectly medium, neither long nor short. Bill Lierman, the Rodeo Club's sponsor, recalled nothing untoward. Says Lierman, 'He wasn't a rowdy. He got along fine with all the kids.' In a sampling of schoolmates' reminiscences shows a consensus. David Wildman, the basketball captain calls him a 'middle of the roader.' Only Sally Bentley, 26, disputes the description of genial blandness. She says, 'He was well known because his sister was well known. John was mousey. His sister was friendly, cute and alive. I thought he was sour about that. John never did anything outstanding or memorable.'"

No, it wasn't the good home that spoiled it. I agree with you, it wasn't the parents who spoiled it. It wasn't the swimming pool or luxury or the good schools or the nice neighborhood. No! I don't think it was those things that spoiled him. You know what spoiled him if you read the letter he sent to the little film star, Jodie Foster. It was really a problem with what makes a person valuable. It was that heresy underlying all of his life, because he wrote to her, "Now when I get Reagan, you will know that I exist. You will at last know who I am." That was it. It was the idea that you establish your self-worth by conforming to what everybody else wants you to be. You conform to the kind of person they like. You conform to doing the kinds of things they think are smart or swinging. You conform to the things that everybody praises. If you do that you will begin to feel you are worth something, and if you can't do that you are lost completely. That is it, loved ones. It is that dreadful belief that I'm sure lurks in some of our dear minds. The idea that you are valuable and worth something if somebody else thinks you are. You know fine well that many of us are caught in the same thing. We haven't shot a president, but we are under the same kind of enslavement.

Loved ones, God's Word says something clear and strong not only to that dear guy but to every one of us, and I would like you to look at it. Those of you who may not believe the Bible or believe there is a God, I wish you would hear this and take it to yourself. Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world." Don't be conformed to this world in order to try to establish your worth. It will never establish your worth. Don't rise to what they want you to be--a great military leader storming into Jerusalem and taking over the Roman powers of occupation by military force and claiming yourself king of Israel. Don't do that. Your worth doesn't depend on what people think of you. Your worth depends on the fact that I whispered to you on the bank of the river one day, "You are my Beloved Son. I'm pleased with you."

It doesn't matter whether they like you in class or not. It doesn't matter whether you got three pages in the yearbook or no pages in the yearbook. It doesn't matter whether you are thought of as absolutely unimportant and a non-entity. It doesn't matter whether your peers ignore you or whether they laud you. That doesn't matter. That is not what you and I need. It's not just self-esteem from anybody that we need; you know what we need. Each one of us needs to know that we are not a deviate atom thrown up by some impersonal evolutionary process. We need to know that somebody who can do something about it, knows we are here, planned to put us here, has counted the hairs of our head and has a purpose in our being in this world. That is it, loved ones. The other is crass deception. It doesn't matter what anybody thinks of you. That is not what establishes your worth; that is not what establishes your value.

Now, how on earth can you stop being conformed to this world? I think you are the same as I was; you haven't shot any Devastator .22 caliber bullets at anyone, and you have given up or to a certain extent or repressed the teenage fantasies of saving the maiden in distress or doing the wonderful thing that everybody will praise. You have repressed those fantasies but you know fine well that you do still find lurking inside you still desires for people to like you. You don't shoot bullets at them, but you shoot darts of envy and jealousy and resentment when you see the others praised and you are ignored. You know that a lot of our discontent and restlessness inside comes from that. Even though we know we shouldn't be conformed in order to get people to praise us, yet we are blasted in the media with the idea that self-esteem and self-worth comes from what other people think of us. How can we be freed from that, loved ones?

First of all, will you look at Romans 12:1? That is the first step. "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." Do that first. The world has only one owner. What you and I need to know is that he remembers that he put us here. He hasn't forgotten. He knows our names and that he put us here to develop his world in a certain way that only we can. Maybe all we will do is a little bit of it, maybe all we will do is paint a little piece of wall somewhere, or say one word to the right person in our whole lifetime, but we are here by the Creator's declaration and appointment to do something to make his world like his plan, and only we can do it. It is that that we need to know from him.

Other people say, "Oh, no; it is anybody's esteem--your teacher's esteem, your parent's esteem, your peer's esteem." Loved ones, possibly none of your teachers will be alive when you go through the final experience. They won't be there to help you at that moment. Our peers won't be on the other side of death to say, "There is life here, we can show you through to it." Your bosses will be out of that position in ten or fifteen years' time; they have no power over you. Our teachers, our peers or our friends will be no use to us at the crucial moment that we know we need someone--that moment when we leave this life, when we leave this earth. There is only One who counts at that moment, and that is the only one significant other that really matters--the Creator of the universe. So, loved ones, the first step is quietly to say, "God, I present my body to you as a living sacrifice. Lord, will you show me why you put me here? That is what I want to do." You have to take a definite step. Don't think you can think your way into that one. God has to hear you saying that. Present your life to him for him to use in the way that he designed to use you.

The second step is in verse 2: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." Renew your mind every day. Every time you find yourself smiling to please somebody, wipe the smile off your face and think, "Lord, your opinion is the only one that counts. Forget this dumbness, I'm not a puppet. It doesn't matter whether they like me or don't like me. Lord God, what

do you think of me at this moment?" Renew the way you think. When you find yourself saying something swinging or smart to make an impression, just pull yourself up, renew your mind, and say, "Lord, this is stupid. What am I doing impressing them? They will be dead before I am, and what power do they have over me anyway? You are the only One that has power over me. Lord, I'm sorry. I apologize for that smart remark. Lord, I have no need to get Gallup polls to persuade me that I'm worth something. Lord, I know you know I'm here and that is all that matters." Every time you find yourself doing something because everyone else is doing it, turn to him.

Honestly, if you are real with God, he will let you know. He will say to you, "Why are you making a monkey of yourself because all the rest are?" The moment that comes in your conscience, recognize it and say, "Lord, I'm sorry", and start thinking in a different way. Begin to realize that part of what brought Hinckley into this chaotic, tragic situation was his belief that his self-esteem and self-worth was established by what other people thought of him. It isn't true! It just isn't true! We are not little animals that need to be stroked all the time. We are human beings on a spaceship called Earth who want to be sure that somebody knows we are here who has power over this spaceship, and above all, who will have power over us after we leave it. That's what we need, loved ones.

There are two steps to establish self-worth. Present your life to the God who put you here and who has a special purpose for you in your life. Secondly, each time you find yourself making a monkey of yourself to please others, change your thinking and say to your God, "Lord, your opinion alone matters; it doesn't matter what they think." Because of the pressure -- I found it more so here than in Ireland -- of this dear society of ours, I feel for each one of your dear hearts. Let's step out; let's escape this together, and let's help each other.

Let us pray.

Dear God, we feel for John Hinckley. We feel what good things produce but we do recognize that account of his life and the emphasis of being the right kind of clean cut guy or cute, popular girl has exerted its power of us too. Lord, we continually find ourselves conforming to what others think, hoping it will establish our self esteem and self worth. Then we are baffled, Lord, because we don't feel we are anything or have any worth. We still have problems with inferiority.

Lord, we see this morning that we are tackling it the wrong way completely. What we really need to know deep down in our hearts is that you know we are here. You, the owner and maker of the universe, made us and you put us here to do something special for you. Lord, we want to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is our reasonable service. Lord, we ask you to show us why you put us here and Lord, believe us that is what we want to do. We want to do what you want us to do. We know that a flood of confidence and peace will displace the feelings of inferiority and lack of self confidence the moment we deal with you this morning. So, Lord, we would say that this morning.

Lord God, we would pray for each other that daily we would renew our minds. We would stop thinking this wrong, crass, deceptive way. We would stop thinking our self worth depends on what others think of us. Lord, we would remind ourselves that only one opinion counts in this whole universe because only one person is powerful in this universe. Lord, we commit ourselves to you for what you have for us to do in this life. We commit ourselves to think the right way in regard to this issue.

Lord, we would pray for each loved one here in this room that by your Holy Spirit they may experience what Jesus himself experienced -- complete peace even when the whole world was crucifying

him.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the dear Holy Spirit be with each of us.