

## “The Power of Shame”

**Date:** January 14, ,2018      **Place:** Lakewood UMC      **Theme:** Shame, Grace, Forgiveness      **Texts:** Luke 15:11-24; Genesis 2:18, 21-25; 3:1-7

I want to tell you a couple of stories this morning that I haven't told anyone in a very long time. Why? - because I'm ashamed and embarrassed. As I recall, both of these events happened in first grade. I remember a time when I couldn't make it to the bathroom in time, and I wet my pants. I wanted to hide and run away, I was so embarrassed. I was filled with shame.

Another time, I remember getting a paper back from the teacher. I think it was a math paper and I didn't do very well on it. There were a lot of red marks on it. My parents would hang my pictures and *good* papers on the refrigerator. But I was afraid they would be disappointed in me.

Maybe they wouldn't love me if I didn't get good grades on every paper. I remember getting off the school bus and running to the big front porch on our house and stuffing that paper under some rocks. I didn't want them to see my paper that I didn't do well on. I was filled with shame, and I wanted to hide.

Shame does that to a person; it makes him or her want to run away and hide. After Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, their eyes were opened and they knew the difference. They knew they had done wrong. And what did they do? They tried to run away and hide from God. They were filled with shame.

Shame makes us feel small, flawed, and not good enough. Shame is the fear of being unworthy. Do you struggle with the fear that you're not enough? Are you afraid to let your true self be seen and known? Are you always trying to prove you are valuable and worthy of being loved?

There is hope. God wants to break the power of shame in your life. God created you for a unique purpose. God has a specific plan for your life and has a powerful destiny God wants you to fulfill. And guess what? Shame has no place in that purpose, plan and destiny. Jesus came to set us from shame.

Christine Caine, in her book *Unashamed*, talks about being shamed when she was a school girl because of her Greek background, that was different from the other children. They made fun of the way she talked and the food she ate and where her people came from.

She was made to feel like she didn't belong, like she wasn't wanted. The other children shamed her. She wanted to run away and hide. Shame does that – makes you feel less than, not good enough, unworthy. And it happens all the time.

People feel shame about their body image, their skin color, their sexual orientation, even their gender. They've been made to feel less than others because they don't look like, act like or sound like whoever is doing the shaming.

We may feel shame because of something we did – like get a girl pregnant, or have an abortion. We may feel shame because of things that people have said to us – calling us names, telling us we're stupid, or not pretty enough, or not very athletic.

We do it to ourselves as well. We tell ourselves we're not good enough, pretty enough, smart enough. We feel inadequate about our parenting style, our income, our work habits, our academic skills, or any number of things that we tell ourselves we're not good enough.

Persons who have been abused – physically, emotionally, sexually have been made to feel that they are unworthy. At first they are ashamed

of what is happening to them. And then, when it happens over time, they begin to think it is happening because of them. They begin to believe, “I must be at fault. I must be a bad person. God must not love me or He would protect me. I guess I’m not worthy of God’s attention.”

Shame does that. It whispers lies to your soul. Shame is a powerful emotion. It wears many different faces: humiliation, disgrace, unworthiness, embarrassment, anger, remorse, despair and self-reproach. And it affects all of us, to some degree or another. The person sitting in the pew beside you or in front of you struggles with shame.

The very successful businessman who works extremely long hours and does very well, or the very together Mom who always seems to do it all and wear a smile while she does it, both may secretly feel like they’re not enough. We can be highly accomplished over-achievers, and feel ashamed and inadequate on the inside. We may tell ourselves or believe, “I’m a bad person.” Or “I’m not deserving of love.” Or “I’m not enough.”

Shame keeps us from being all that God wants us to be. Shame is fundamentally being ashamed of who I am, feeling inadequate, unworthy and flawed.

There is a difference, though, between guilt and shame. Guilt is what we feel when we’ve done something wrong and we feel bad about what we’ve done. Shame is when we essentially feel bad about who we are. But there is a difference between “who” and “do.”

God can be disappointed when we do wrong things. But God is never disappointed in who we are. Remember the story of the prodigal son with me. The younger son asks for his father’s inheritance money, runs off and squanders it in frivolous living. When he reaches the end of his rope he feels hopeless.

He remembers his father has hired hands; and they live better than he is living right now, among the hogs he is feeding. So he decides to return home and beg for his father's forgiveness. He believes he is not worthy to be his father's son again, just treat him like one of his hired servants and that would be enough. With his tail between his legs, he crawls back home, full of shame at what he has done and who he is.

But before his feet even hit the driveway, his father comes running out to meet him. The father throws his arms around his son and kisses him and tells him he is so glad to have him home. The father throws a party to celebrate his return.

Jesus tells us this parable to illustrate the shame-lifting love of our heavenly Father. The only antidote to the power of shame is the unconditional love, grace and acceptance of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. Hear the good news: God loves you. God accepts you. God sees you as having infinite value and worth.

We are loved, accepted, and sons and daughters of the King of kings. Jesus Christ has shown us the Father's love. Jesus Christ has demonstrated the Father's love. Jesus Christ has revealed the Father's love for us, most clearly in the cross of Calvary.

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, he did not shame the people who were doing this horrible thing to him. He did not call down the wrath of God upon them. Instead, Jesus forgives them. There is power in those words. Because we can do wrong things, and still be loved by God. We have not lost our worth in the Father's eyes.

I remember reading a sermon illustration that brought me to tears, because it reminded me of my own experience in first grade. You see, an

autistic boy was sitting in class and he too wet his pants. But one of the other boys in the class saw what had happened.

Anticipating the laughter and the ridicule he would face, the other boy got up and ran to the window to get the watering can which they used to water the plants on the window sill. He then pretended to trip and spill the water all over the boy. No one would know that he had wet his pants.

Instead of laughing at the boy who wet his pants, the class laughed at the boy who had pretended to trip and spill the water. Do you see what he has done? He took the fall, so the boy wouldn't have to suffer. And that is what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

God loves you and me so much, that God wants to set us free from our shame. And so God is willing to take the fall for you and me. God wants us to be free from our shame, and restored to the way we were when we were created.

What does Scripture say about who we are? Psalm 139:14 says, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Genesis 1:27-28 says "we are made in the image of God. Male and female he created them, and God blessed them." Nowhere does it say that we are fundamentally flawed and worthless, the message of shame. In Jesus Christ, God is restoring us to the beauty of the original creation. We are being restored to the image of God. Shame has no place there.

Instead of running away from God, instead of hiding from God, instead of feeling unworthy in God's presence, we can instead run to the arms of the Loving Father and feel his unconditional love, acceptance and grace. Let us pray together the opening prayer found in your bulletin.

This sermon borrows heavily from the book and workbook entitled *Unashamed* by Christine Caine, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press, 2016, pp. 11-45.