

"We are More Than Enough"

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Psalm 139:1-18

About three weeks ago, our minivan full of teenagers, good tunes and (a considerable amount of) laughter rolled into the St. John's parking lot. One of our youth rolled down the window, stuck her head out, and yelled to Bob Miller "BOB! Your wife is home!" All smiles, we greeted our parents and Bob greeted Betsy after a week of fun, good food, fellowship, and growth. We had a great time learning about God, discipleship, and exploring scripture.

If you missed it in June, we spent two weeks on the Beatitudes exploring our middle school Massanetta youth conference theme "Blessed Be" so that you could get a glance of what our youth were learning this summer. Today marks the first Sunday in our two-week series exploring our high school Montreat youth conference theme "more than enough".

Montreat is what we Presbyterians like to call a "thin" place nestled in the mountains of Western North Carolina. A small conference center that while quiet and peaceful, is packed with thousands of faithful Presbyterians every year. Particularly in the summer, the full stone Anderson Auditorium is home to at least 5,000 youth from across the nation. Churches travel as far as Texas, Minnesota, Florida, Western NY, California, and believe it or not—even Olomouc in the Czech Republic. People come here from east and from west because a "thin" place is a place you feel almost as close to God as you can get. The mountain air, the trickling creeks, the laughter of children, and front porch rocking chairs are a blissful escape from the world once you drive through the "M" shaped gate.

Along with some mission work in Asheville, our group gathered with 400 other teenagers for a week to listen, learn, sing, experience and explore. We dove into the stories of scripture critically thinking about our relationship with God and how that intrinsically changes our lives. Our theme was "More than Enough"

The front of our bulletin may seem a bit confusing to you today—but it was the foundation of our week together at Montreat. The first day our keynote speaker introduced herself. Pam, a pastor, with 2 sons, a dad who loved basketball, fierce lover of sports, spends all her time outdoors, loves her dog to pieces, Pam. She asked us how many squares we saw on this image. I'm curious—how many squares do you see?

Upon first glance one would say "16" or "17"—the strategic ones among you might have seen 30 or 32. When Pam introduced herself to us she shared her 16 squares "upon first glance" parts of her life.

Then Pam began to share what was beyond those 16 or 17 "first glance squares"—a painful marriage of 20 years that led to a divorce and finding new love, to whom she has been married for 10 years, her dad who is so set back by his lack of mobility in his old age robbing him of what once brought him joy—basketball. He is deeply grieving the loss of his wife. She shared so much

more with us that honestly, still brings me to tears. She was brave and vulnerable and shared so much more of herself than what we saw at first glance—the 16 squares.

It is so easy to see someone and make assumptions about who they are, or what they represent, simply because of their 16 squares. OR to see ourselves for our 16 squares—to concern ourselves simply with what the world sees or what we think the world expects of us, rather than seeing what God sees, what God expects from us—our own individual and beautiful story. The one who knows us beyond our 16 squares—who knows us to our core—all 32 squares, is God, our creator.

Our Psalm today was written by David—a broken servant of God who made many mistakes. And yet in the face of those mistakes was part of the line to Jesus. David, whose 16 squares show a lot of mistakes, character flaws, selfishness—David, a not so perfect on the outside child of God found himself writing a psalm—reminding himself that to his core, he is beloved by God.

“you have searched me, you know me, before a word on my tongue you know it completely. I can’t escape your presence, you are there. I am fearfully and wonderfully made—how magnificent are your works”

David was praising God in his writing—but I like to think he was also reminding himself that he was more than enough for God. To be used by God. To be claimed by God—all the mistakes and regrets and things he couldn’t even forgive himself for yet—didn’t change that he was made in the image of God—that he was More. Than. Enough.

As people of God we hear over and over and over again that we are made in God’s image. That God is our creator—you hear *me* say from this pulpit time and time again—that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. But it just seems, that no matter how many times we hear it, no matter how much we *know* it, whether we *believe* it often leaves something to be desired.

You see, we live in a world full of the expectations. Expectations of ourselves expectations of others. And we see those 16 squares—and forget that we are MORE THAN what what others see at first glance. That others are MORE THAN what we see at first glance. That every part of us is beloved, created, claimed and known by a God who loves us without end even on our worst days—no matter who we are, what we’ve done or what the world tells us we should be.

This struck all of us on the first day of the conference and rightly so because it got to the heart of the matter—what stops us from believing we are more than enough so often starts here.

We spend so much of our energy and time focusing on our 16 squares—what the world sees—on social media, on our linkedin profiles, how our home is decorated/put together, how good we are at sports or hobbies, the person happy and well put together on the Christmas card, the cookie cutter checkbox life we worked so hard to achieve.

But what is truly beneath our 16 squares? Is it a person who believes these words of David, or just someone that hears and knows.

It is easy to think this conference theme was meant for teenagers who we are growing and changing and discovering and finding it hard to love themselves. But this is an epidemic we all struggle with. For some reason, at some point, we all started *knowing* we were loved by God but *believing* we are only loved by the world if we are *useful, appear put together, successful, humble, digestible, not too much, or strong and capable*.

Those things, those thoughts, those narratives, they don't leave us—they just live within us in different ways as we grow older. And after 34 years of life, I wish I could go back and speak tenderly to my younger self. But the reality is that my adult self needs to hear the same things. Because I know my worth, but some days, it is hard to believe it. Some days, I need to read David's Psalm—and remind myself where it all begins—in the eyes of God, I am more. Than. Enough.

I have to admit it was incredibly hard for me to even think about writing a sermon like this for you all—because this very thing has always been challenging for me. I'm a hopeless rule follower. If there's an assignment, I'm here for it! I thrive on structure and expectations so I can rise to meet them. I am always working to be better, asking for those around me to give “constructive” criticism because I don't know who I am if I am not improving, growing learning. So for me, working at those 16 squares—consumed my goals, my life, my relationships. I wanted to be who I was expected to be—who I was supposed to be as determined by the people and culture around me—rather than living into my identity as a child of God.

This Spring, I was given an assignment—to write 10 things—TEN things that I love about myself, but the catch was---it couldn't be associated with my productivity. So I couldn't say—I'm responsible, reliable...because it was associated with my utility to others—what I could do. And you know what? It was hard! It was so hard. It still is! It was a hard exercise that taught me how much I truly rely on my 16 squares looking like what the world tells me to be versus who God made me to be.

It is easy to confuse what the world says our worth is and what God says our worth is. The world wants to know how we can contribute, help, move things forward—the world is concerned with what we can *do*, our utility. The world glorifies those who are responsible, successful, reliable, productive, together. But God sees beyond those things. God strips all those things away and still sees our worth—do we?. God's view of us simply is that we are, in its most pure form—beloved, no matter what we do or not do—we will never be separated from God. More than enough.

So, what are those things for you? What are those things about you that you love, that others may love, the person who God loves and created?

On the back of our hymn insert are some questions for you to think about this too—what are 10 things that you can write down that you love about yourself...not the 16 squares self—the person that God sees—a loved one may be helpful in creating this list for you. Write it down, return to it, read it. Believe it.

There should be a small mirror at the end of each of your pews.

I invite you to each take one, hold it up so you can see yourself. Take a moment. Take a deep breath, and see yourself. God created you. God sees beyond what you see in the mirror. God sees your heart. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Repeat after me:

You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,

My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

Nothing can separate me from you love.

In your eyes, I am more than enough. May I know it. May I believe it

Benediction:

One of the things I loved that we did on our trip was to write letters. At Massanetta, we had our parents and pastors write letters to our youth ahead of time, so they could open them on their trip. At Montreat, we each had bags with our names on it and wrote each other letters throughout the week about what we appreciated about one another/encouraging each other to be who God made us to be. Likewise, our Bible is FULL of letters that Paul wrote to churches, encouraging them, teaching them, engaging them. One of Paul's most quoted letters is that of Romans where he says--

8:35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

8:38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

8:39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What I am drawn to time and time again is Paul's claim—with the utmost confidence—that we are made in God's image, that God knows us to our core, and that *nothing* can separate us from the love of Christ. *Nothing*. Not heartache, not shame, not fear, not guilt, not grief, not resentment, not insecurity, not chronic illness, not addiction, not depression, not divorce, not estrangement, NOTHING. Nothing will separate you from the Love of God, who created you.

Friends, may you hear the great good news today—you are loved, you are enough, you are fearfully and wonderfully made in the eyes of your creator. May you remind yourself each and every day. May you believe it, and may you know that this love...will never. Ever leave you. Paul is convinced of it, and so am I.

BENEDICTION

