

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. I Peter 2:9-10 NIV

Self worth, self image; how important is it? More than you might think. To have a healthy good self image comes from what we feel about ourselves, and the feedback we get from others. Unfortunately it is much easier to get negative feedback than positive. Some years ago when I was teaching a high school Sunday school class, one of the exercises was to tape complaints about people, then after taping and discussing them, they were to tape positive things about the same people. The “negative” comments far outweighed the “positive”. In fact at one point in the “positive” comments there was absolute silence.

Where negativity can really hurt is when those closest to us, probably without bad intentions on their part, make a comment or speak to us in such a way that it can cripple our self image for a very long time. I remember reading of such a situation. The family member made a particularly hurtful comment about someone when they were a child. That comment hobbled them emotionally for a very long time. Finally at a family celebration the conversation turned to that comment. The one who made the comment was shocked, and said “that’s not what I meant at all”. Still the damage was done.

Early Christians had a “self-image” problem too. For the most part they were from the poorer segments of society. They had given up the official state religion to worship what looked like to others as bizarre, worshipping a “crucified god”. So they were not only subject persecution but also ridicule. If you were from the poorer segment of society, with a poor self image to begin with, how would this make you feel?

Peter, in the letter that the above scripture verses were taken was keenly aware of their plight. So he lets them know what God thinks of them to encourage their faith. Confessing Christ and belonging to God puts them on the highest status. It is also interesting in scripture that when Jesus encounters folk of low self-image and societal importance he encourages them.

“God so loved the world...” begins a very familiar scripture verse from the gospel of John. There are times we should substitute our own name when we feel discouraged about ourselves. Martin Luther’s view of himself changed when realized his salvation was not how good he was but rather God’s acceptance of him through Jesus Christ.

But there is another part we can play. Can we communicate God’s encouragement to others? Peter obviously does that to these new Christians. The apostle Paul would have never been accepted as a brother in Christ among the apostles if Barnabas had not stepped in.

Is there a good word you can say today to someone you know? Say it, it might be life changing. Are you discouraged about yourself? Read John 3:16 and substitute your name for “the world”. Read the two verses at the top out loud. RIGHT NOW!!

St. Augustine once said “God loves us as if there were only one of us”. May we communicate that to others as well as to ourselves.

Pr. John Van Haneghan