

St. Mary's Sermons

Hebrews 12:1-12

Shame

When we think about the benefits of Jesus dying on the cross for us the focus of our attention has naturally been on the forgiveness of our sins and of course that is entirely right and appropriate. But I think there is at least one important aspect of the work of Jesus on the cross that has tended to get overlooked and that is when he died on the cross, as well as dealing the fatal blow to our sin, he also dealt with our shame. I don't ever recall hearing a single sermon which has dealt primarily with the issue of shame, but shame is something that has a very detrimental and powerful negative effect on the way that many people live and is certainly something that prevents them from living their lives to their full potential. So this morning I want to put that record straight and think about what it means for Jesus to deal with our shame.

Firstly I want to begin by giving you a simple definition of shame and thinking a little bit about what causes shame.

It is now widely recognised that there is a huge difference between guilt and shame. For years many people have wrongly assumed that they meant the same thing. In actuality fact they are something completely different altogether.

Guilt is the negative feeling I experience when I have done something which I know is wrong. Shame on the other hand is the negative feeling I experience about who I am. Guilt is about doing, while shame is about being. When a person feels guilty they regret what they have done. When a person feels shame they regret who they are.

Of course there can be many different causes that trigger these feelings of shame and it is impossible to deal with them all during the course of a single sermon but I want to suggest that **one** of the major factors that causes shame is a father wound. When a child is separated from their father, for whatever reason, they are separated from the primary transmitter of honour in their lives. The father is no longer present to give that much needed affirmation. He is not there to tell his son that he is proud of him. He is no longer present to tell his daughter that she is beautiful. Without this affirmation a child will begin to feel worthless, and begin to believe the lie that it is their fault that their father does not love them.

I am only too aware that father's can be physically present but emotionally absent. I know this from personal experience. In many ways I had a good Christian family and upbringing. My dad certainly was present and completely committed to his family but during the crucial years of my early childhood, the majority of his attention was given to my disabled sister. He did not appear to have time for me and I never received the affirmation of his love. Consequently I frequently felt as though I was unimportant and worthless. Of course looking back now I can fully appreciate that it was completely necessary for dad to help mum to care for my sister, after all it was a twenty four hours a day task because her disability were very sever. I now know that he did not love me any less than he did my sister but at the time my experience had a profound effect upon my childhood and was the source of a considerable amount of pain. It took many years before I came to really understand the reason for this.

The power that negative thinking can have on us can hardly be over stated. Mark tells the story of Norman Vincent Peale who one day was so outraged at a tattoo that he spotted in shop window that he went into the shop to talk to the tattooist about it. The tattoo at the heart of the problem simply said, born to loose. Peale asked the Chinese tattooist whether anyone would ever want to have such a thing permanently tattooed into their skin.

The man said yes. Peale then exclaimed who in their right mind would ever have such a dreadful message permanently etched into them as born to loose? The body artist tapped his forehead and replied. Before tattoo on skin, tattoo on mind.

Children who grow up with the sense that they are not really valued and consequently feel worthless often end up believing lies about themselves. Some end up rejecting, hating and even harming themselves. It is so easy for them to start playing the blame game and the person they end up blaming more than anyone else of course is themselves. Make no mistake about it worthlessness is very painful and has a destructive effect on the way that many people feel about themselves and also the way that they live.

We could say a lot more about the important role that fathers play in the development of their children and the negative consequences if they do not fulfil them. My friend Mark Stibbe has done a lot of thinking about what he

calls the pandemic of fatherless-ness that is afflicting many western societies and he has written extensively about it. Worthlessness is in fact just one of 10 classic symptoms commonly associated with the wounds caused by fathers.

On the cross Jesus embraced the experience of shame. Our reading from the letter to the Hebrews powerfully reminds us that on the cross Jesus scorned its shame. Crucifixion was considered to be the single most shameful form of execution in the ancient world. It was a form of torture reserved for the lowest of the low, for criminals and slaves. Yet amazingly we see Jesus, the lord of glory, the king of the universe, the creator of the entire world humbly submitting himself to a humiliating death for us.

Christians in the western world have traditionally understood the cross in terms of forgiveness for what we have done. While Christians in the Eastern Church have tended to focus on the cross as dealing with our shame, they are more inclined to understand the death of Jesus as setting us free from who we are. In fact it is one of those cases of both and, not either or. PTL the good news has just got even better!

Not only did Jesus deal with our guilt when he died for us he also truly sets us free from our shame, he liberates us completely from those feelings of worthlessness that so often drag us down. Shame acts like a ball and chain around our leg and the cross is the key that unlocks the chain and sets us free bringing wholeness and healing. The cross is the only place where we can find this lasting breakthrough. There Jesus gets our shame while we experience his honour. Jesus places those royal robes we don't deserve all around us and covers our nakedness and our shame.

The bottom line is that God wants us to know that he truly appreciates us, that he values us and that he loves us, not for anything that we have done but simply for who we are. Although I am not a great fan of tattoos if there is a tattoo that we could legitimately have as Christians it is, the father himself loves us. And as that tattoo artist rightly said we need to know the reality of this in our minds before we have it placed on our skin.