

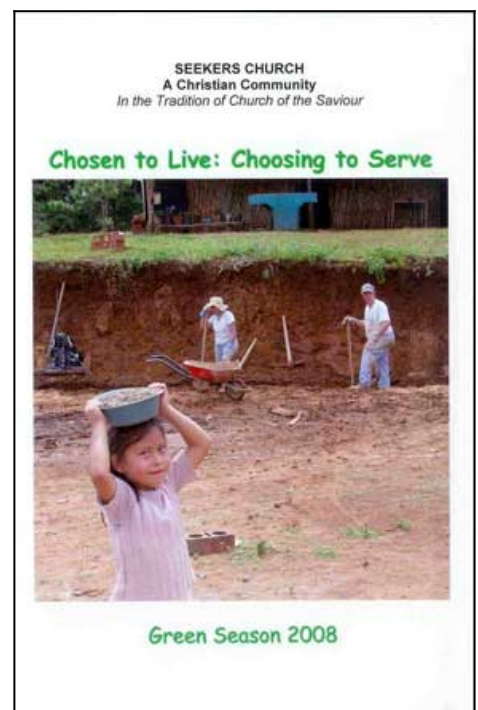
# "What You Tell Yourself" by Lia Scholl of Starlight Ministries

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July 27, 2008

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

13:31 He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;



13:32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. "

13:33 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

13:45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls;

13:46 on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

13:47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind;

13:48 when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad.

13:49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous

13:50 and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13:51 "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

13:52 And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

I hope that you'll allow me a little "preacher's license" with this text. I want you to think about the text AS IF the kingdom of heaven is a belief that we are enough, that we are

plentiful, that we are amazing, wonderful creatures and loved completely by God. Are you ready for this?

He put before them another parable: "The belief in your own amazingness is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

He told them another parable: "The the belief that you are enough is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

"The belief that you are good and true is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

"Again, the belief that you are loved beyond measure is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad.

Did you ever hear that it takes 10 compliments to counteract one negative comment in a person's life? Imagine this. How many negative comments do you hear a day? How many have you heard in your life? And then, how many positive comments do you hear?

But what about the negative comments that come from ABOVE. You know, the things the preacher says. The things that society says. The things that communities say. "We're sinners." "All of humanity is evil." "Being gay, being transgendered, being a sex worker, being a nerd, being a slut, being a smoker, being a liar, being an addict, being single, being DIFFERENT in any

way is evil.”

How many compliments does it take to counteract those comments?

And then, God forbid even more, there’s the negative comments in your head. When you look in the mirror, you think, “I’m fat.” Or perhaps, “I’m not cute.” Or you type a report and you think, “I’m stupid.” Or you trip over a box and think, “I’m clumsy.”

And then there are the deeper thoughts. “No one will ever love me.” “If they knew the REAL me, they wouldn’t like me.” “I don’t deserve any better than this.”

How many compliments does it take to counteract those comments?

I would posit to you that the comments we tell ourselves are the most damaging. Sure, they may be caused by those negative comments by individuals, by society, by religion. But it’s the fact that we believe them.

And because we believe them, we dare not whisper them out loud. We dare not tell those around us that we believe them. We dare not expose them in the light. We dare not tell our neighbor.

I’ve just finished a book called No Man’s Land by Ruth Fowler. A British young woman with no papers for the United States works as a stripper in New York. It’s a memoir, hard to read for its darkness. But this scene keeps coming back to me...And instead of reading it to you, because we are, after all in church, and we are after all, supposed to pretend like bad things don’t happen, of all places, I will read you her thoughts after the event, not the real rape.

Ruth, called throughout the book by her stage name Mimi, is drugged and raped by one of the managers at her club. She

likens the rape to religious training in catechesis.

She writes, "wish I could forget this bit but I can't vague surreal sense of confusion why-is-this-why-this-is-happening I gobble it down swallow every last drop I receive him in place of God this harsh metallic salty taste in my mouth and the music starts to penetrate my aching sore— Hail Mary, full of grace ...

She continues,

I can still speak, when the night is over I find my way to my locker to get dressed. I keep breaking, I told [my boyfriend] Eton once. It's OK, you're allowed to break, he said, but didn't he get it? Didn't he understand what happens when the cracks and flaws held tenuously together are dropped on the stone flagged floor in front of of the gasping, titillated audience, watching the break in avarice, in disgusted fascination? et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus (Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus) I'm broken, I told him, and I laughed and laughed and laughed, broken was always broken, was broken before this, will be broken long after blessed is the fruit of thy womb but this, this, was what it was to be broken Sancta Maria this feeling, fingernails scraping down skin, leaving white trails in airbrushed skin and the dark, greasy sludges beneath a manicure, nails dig harder, deeper, and only then with a pathetic whimper and a sob do you release Mater Dei ora pro nobis peccatoribus, (Mother of God, pray for us sinners) in the shower with the water at full blast so the roommates can't hear, and I wonder if what I thought I was before all this was just a role, cast off like a snake's brittle paper skin, until with a rip and a tear you got down to the core, pray for3 us sinners now the molten, raw, cancerous center nobis peccatoribus (pray for us sinners) I think of their faces as they bow their heads in prayer, Mam's hand reaching for mine, and mind stuck deep, sulkily into my pocket peccatoribus (us sinners) [my boyfriend] Eton was Catholic too, he took me to Church once on Easter Sunday,

shaking his head at my mortal sin, the revelation that the last time I had been was when I was twelve years old peccavi (sinner) I close my eyes.

Amen.

All I can hear, when I read this passage, is, "It's my fault. It's my fault. It's my fault" with a lot of "I deserve this, I deserve this, I deserve this" thrown in.

Would you tell your best friend, if she had been drugged and raped, that it was her fault?

Would you tell him that he deserved it? No. Never.

And yet it is what we tell ourselves.

Perhaps you haven't told yourself that a rape was your fault, or that violence committed upon you was your fault. Maybe you're one of the lucky ones that has avoided all abuse, all distrust, all the feelings that go along with feeling different.

But I live in the real world.

I am convinced that this is the biggest problem of human beings. And it is the biggest sin that the church commits. And it is the biggest issue that we, as humans, have. It is the thing that brings destruction to the world. It is, for everything else, the thing that divides us, creates war, creates conflict, creates a feeling for people that the world isn't safe and that God can't really love us.

"It's my fault. It's my fault. It's my fault" with a lot of "I deserve this, I deserve this, I deserve this" thrown in.

Because, really, how could a God really love me, if "I deserve this, I deserve this, I deserve this?"

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is this: You are created in

the image of God. You are beloved by God. And even more than just that tired, old word beloved, you are CHERISHED by God. God is particularly fond of you, her child. And it's a love that's so deep, so amazing, so accepting, so WHOLE and all it wants is to be in relationship with you.

If you hear nothing else I say today, hear this: God's love is a love that accepts you, the whole you, and NOT IN SPITE of who you are, but precisely because you are who you are.

"The belief in your own amazingness is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

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I got a call last week from a young woman on the edge. She was feeling the urge to hurt herself. Now, just as background, I should tell you... this woman is a mess. She's a beautiful mess, but she is a mess. Eighteen months ago she called me and asked me for a letter for the court that would stand up for her against a felony fraud charge. Now, she's in a relationship

with a bad guy who just got out of prison. Her crack-addict Mom has been living with her, and stole her car. Which got her fired from her job, because she couldn't get to work. And her drug-addicted, whoring boyfriend got her evicted from her apartment. And her car got impounded for a joint that she swears isn't hers. And, she's pregnant.

And she calls me up on Tuesday wanting to hurt herself.

I look at this young woman and I see so much pain, so much conflict, and so much work to be done, that I'm not really sure that she will ever be on a normal path. Really. It is women like this young woman who make me question the work I do. She makes me tired.

And then I stop for a minute, and I try to look at her with God's eyes. God looks at her and says, "You know, I am particularly fond of this one." God sees her beauty, her spark, her kindness, her laughter, her love, her joy, and her pain. And God loves every tiny bit of it.

And if God loves her like that, then who am I to let her go?

I wrote that letter for the courts for her months ago. I struggled with it for days, working with a friend that knows her, trying to find some way to say to the judge to see her as a whole person, to know what's she's been through, and how much she could be capable of. But I didn't let her off the hook, either. I told the judge that I knew she could do some bad things, too.

I sent the letter to her. She called me after receiving it, crying. "That's the nicest thing anyone has ever said about me," she said. And if that's the nicest thing anyone has ever said about her, it's no wonder her inside voice is so loud.

So, if God loves her like that, who am I to let her go? And how do I work to counter that voice in her head? And the voices from the church? And from society? And from her



neighbors, her lovers, her family?

How can we do it together?

We have to look at our own voices. If your voice tells you anything other than "You are amazing, wonderful, beautiful, courageous, lovely, and kind," then let it go. Tell the voice to go away, that you want to hear God's voice. And God's voice will tell you, "I am particularly fond of you."

May it ever be.