

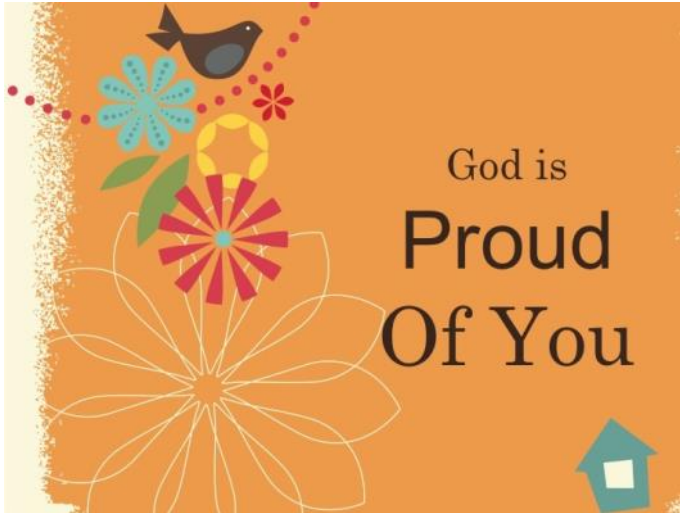
Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

March 1, 2015

“God Is Proud of You”



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister
Lucia Gallo: Lay Reader

Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

Romans 4:13-17

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Genesis 17:1-6

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

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“God Is Proud Of You”

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A man is praying to God and God is answering him back. The man says, “God, what is a million years like to you?” God says, “Like one second.” The man says, “God, what is a million dollars like to you?” God says, “Like one penny.” The man says, “God, can I have a penny?” God says, “Just a second.”

God is proud of you. That's what I want to talk with you about today. God is proud of you. Whether you have a million dollars or one penny. Whether you live in a mansion or a shack. Whether you wear a suit or blue jeans. God is proud of you. Whether you're a believer or a doubter. Whether you were baptized by immersion or by sprinkling. Whether you study the King James Version of the Bible or the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. God is proud of you. Whether you're a cat person or a dog person. Whether you send email or snail mail. Whether you drive a car or a golf cart. God is proud of you. (Say to those around you: God is proud of you. God is proud of you. God is proud of you.)

Johnny Carson, the man who set the standard for late-night talk-show hosts, was never really sure whether his mom was proud of him or not. She would do interviews and belittle Johnny Carson. I mean here he was, an icon of television, and his mom would make disparaging remarks about him. But then, after she died, Johnny Carson found a big box in her house filled with stories about Johnny Carson, interviews with Johnny Carson, and all kinds of paraphernalia having to do with Johnny Carson. He took that box home with him, because it told him that his mom was proud of her son. Maybe you had parents that were proud of you. They put your elementary school artwork up on the refrigerator. They put your trophies up on the mantle. They went to all your dance recitals or sporting events. Or maybe your parents didn't seem to be proud of you. They didn't put your elementary school artwork up on the refrigerator. They didn't put your trophies up on the mantle. They didn't go to any of your dance recitals or sporting events. Regardless of whether your parents were proud of you or not, I believe God is proud of you. And I believe that because the Bible tells me so.

Abram was 99 years old. God appeared to Abram. God said, "I will make my covenant between me and you." God said, "You will be the ancestor of a multitude of nations." God said, "No longer will your name be Abram, but your name will be

Abraham.” God said, “You will be exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you.” And then Abraham became the father of all the nations. Abraham was the father of Ishmael, whom the Muslims trace their ancestry back to; and Abraham was the father of Isaac, whom the Jews and the Christians trace their ancestry back to. And when you think about it, all the Hindus, all the Buddhists, all the atheists, and all the people of the world trace their ancestry back to Abraham. I’m not sure if Ancestry.com can trace people all the way back to Abraham. But the Bible traces people all the way back to Abraham. So we are all related. It’s too bad all the warring factions in the Middle East and elsewhere don’t recognize that. Or don’t want to recognize that. But God recognizes that. God recognizes that we all have Abraham as our father. Just as we all have Noah as our father. And just as we all have Adam as our father. And of course God is our Father too. And I believe God is a proud Father. And I believe God is proud of you.

Romans tells us that it’s not through the law that we are descendants of Abraham, but it’s through faith and God’s grace. In other words, Abraham is the father of all of us, through faith and God’s grace. I don’t believe that means that we have to have faith in God’s grace in order to be descendants of Abraham. I believe that means that God’s grace is so great that we are all descendants of Abraham, regardless of our individual faith. After all, you are a descendent of Abraham regardless of the faith of your parents, or the faith of their parents, or the faith of their parents’ parents. I believe that’s true. Because then all the people on this planet truly are the descendants of Abraham and all the people on this planet truly are all brothers and sisters. Whether we’re Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Atheists, or whatever. And I think it’s important for people to recognize that we are all brothers and sisters, because I think that’s the only path to peace for this planet. The only path to peace for this planet is for all the people of the world to recognize that we are all brothers and sisters, descendants of Abraham. And I believe peace among the descendants of Abraham is God’s

goal, because when Jesus was born, he was going to bring, “Peace on Earth.” If you strive for Peace on Earth, I believe God is proud of you.

The Psalmist tells us that, “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to God.” The Psalmist tells us that, “all the families of the nations will worship God.” And the Psalmist tells us that, “future generations will be told about God,” and God will deliver all the “people yet unborn,” meaning all the descendants of Abraham, to God’s grace and peace, which I believe will last for all eternity. This is from Psalm 22. Psalm 22 begins the way Jesus ends on the cross. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” We all know that God did not forsake Jesus on the cross. In fact, according to the Scriptures, he raised Jesus from the dead three days later. So Jesus’ life ends and then begins again, which is the Good News. Because God loves Jesus and God is proud of Jesus. And Psalm 22 ends with good news: all people yet unborn will receive God’s grace and peace for all eternity. Because God loves all people and God is proud of all people. And God loves you and God is proud of you.

Jesus is proud of you too. According to the Gospel of Mark, as long as you’re not ashamed of Jesus, and I got to believe if you’re sitting in this church, you’re not ashamed of Jesus, then Jesus is not ashamed of you. In fact, I believe, Jesus is proud of you. When is Jesus proud of you? Jesus tells us when Jesus is proud of you. When you feed the hungry, when you house the homeless, when you help the hurting, Jesus is proud of you. When you love your neighbor, when you love your enemies, when you love everyone, Jesus is proud of you. When you forgive people, when you turn the other cheek, when you make peace, Jesus is proud of you. And I believe that when Jesus is proud of you, God is proud of you.

600,000 people in America, according to the government, are homeless. 600,000 people, one out of 50 children, live on the streets. Or maybe in homeless shelters. (Or maybe in churches.)

This church is concerned about the homeless. In fact, we house 6 homeless people in our church. They sleep here. But they don't just sleep here. They help out around the church. They help Morris with the Peace Garden, keeping it beautiful. They patrol the grounds, keeping them safe. They help out on Sunday morning, keeping us sounding good. The city of Menifee recently did a headcount of the homeless. They say there are only 12 homeless people in Menifee. I believe the number of homeless people in Menifee is higher than that. I'm trying to get the city or churches or both to build a homeless shelter in Menifee. But if it's true that there are only 12 homeless people in Menifee, then this church houses half the homeless, 50 percent of the homeless people in Menifee are given shelter in our church. You can be proud of that. I believe whenever you house the homeless, God is proud of you.

45 million people in America, according to experts, live in poverty. Nearly 15 million of those people are children. This church is concerned about people living in poverty. In fact, we feed about a dozen people a month at our Saturday breakfast, many of whom live in poverty. And we provide bags of food to several people each month from our Pastor's Pantry. (I just handed a bag of food the other day to a husband and his pregnant wife who are living in poverty.) We also have a Clothing Closet for people in need of coats, shoes, pants, shirts, or blouses. This church also has a Pastors Fund, a Minister's Discretionary Fund, which allows me to give out money given to the fund, to people in need of housing or a meal or just to get by. Recently an anonymous donor gave \$5,000 to the Minister's Discretionary Fund for people in need. You can be proud of what your church does for people living in poverty. I believe whenever you help people living in poverty, God is proud of you.

A standup comic, years ago at a comedy club, back when Billy Joel was married to Christie Brinkley, made a joke about a Billy Joel song that was popular at the time. The comic commented on Billy Joel's song, "I love you just the way you are," which Billy

Joel wrote in honor of his then-wife Christie Brinkley. The comic said, "So Billy Joel is married to one of the most beautiful women in the world and he sings a song to her entitled, 'I love you just the way you are.' Isn't that nice of Billy Joel, to love Christie Brinkley just the way she is?" All kidding aside, I believe that's how God feels about you. If God were going to sing a song about you, I believe God would sing, "I love you just the way you are." God loves you. And God is proud of you.

God started off loving you and being proud of you. According to the book of Genesis, God created you in God's image, God formed you, God breathed life into you, and God blessed you. And God is still blessing you, because God still loves you and God is still proud of you.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to know that you love us.
Help us to know that you bless us.
And help us to know that you are proud of us.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism