

“SOUL LIFT”

**A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT POETRY
BOOK OF PSALMS (PSALM 139:1-6, 13-18) AND
PRESENTED AT ORLEAN UMC ON JANUARY 18, 2015**

TO PARAPHRASE ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING:

**“HOW CAN I LOOK YOUNG AGAIN? LET ME COUNT THE
WAYS.”**

WELL ELIZABETH LET’S SEE WHAT WE HAVE HERE:-----

-----LIVE CELL THERAPY..... BOTOX INJECTIONS....

LIPOSUCTION.... PLACENTA EXTRACTS.... SILICONE

AUGMENTATION.... TEETH WHITENERS.... PHONY

TANS.... ANTI-WRINKLE CREAMS.... HAIR-COLORING....

HAIR IMPLANTS.... SKIN REJUVENATORS.... ET CETERA--

--ET CETERA --ET CETERA.

**BUT IF I MAY ----HERE IS A NEW WRINKLE — AS IT
WERE..... A NEW, SAFE AND QUICK TECHNOLOGY THAT
PROMISES TO GIVE YOU A YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE
FASTER THAN YOU CAN SAY PONCE DE LEON.**

IT'S CALLED THREADING.

**KNOWN AS THE THREADLIFT, THE FEATHERLIFT OR THE
ONESTITCH FACELIFT, THE COSMETIC SURGERY
INVOLVES DOCTORS PULLING GOSSAMER-THIN
STRINGS THROUGH THE SAGGING AREAS OF THE FACE
AND NECK..... ACCORDING TO A REPORT IN *USA TODAY*,
A FEW YEARS AGO----- THREADING NOT ONLY RETURNS
A “YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE” TO SAGGING NECKLINES,**

BUT IT CAN BE COMPLETED WITHOUT INVASIVE SURGERY AND WITH NEARLY NO PAIN, IN 45 MINUTES.

DID YOU HEAR THAT -----FORTY-FIVE MINUTES, PEOPLE!

IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE TREATMENT IS AIMED AT VANITY-CONSCIOUS BOOMERS IN THEIR 40S AND 50S, WAKING UP TO FACES THAT JUST DON'T LOOK AS THEY ONCE DID..... AS ONE FORTY-SOMETHING WOMAN SAID, "AT MY AGE YOU DON'T GET MANY DOUBLE LOOKS." -----AFTER UNDERGOING THE THREADLIFT, SHE WAS NEARLY ECSTATIC AT THE "DOUBLE LOOKS" AND FLATTERED THAT SHE MIGHT BE CONFUSED AS THIRTY-SOMETHING OR YOUNGER..... SHE DESCRIBED THE HEAD-TURNING DOUBLE TAKES AS "EGO-INFLATING."

SOME HAVE CALLED THIS “THE LUNCHTIME BEAUTY FIX” BECAUSE IT CAN BE DONE SO QUICKLY AND WITH A MINIMUM OF PAIN..... BUT, AT AN ESTIMATED \$7,000 TO \$8,000 FOR THE FULL TREATMENT, IT’S NOT DONE WITHOUT TAKING A HEAD-TURNING DOUBLE TAKE AT THE PRICE TAG..... OTHERS CAUTION THAT THIS IS ONLY A SHORT-TERM REMEDY FOR THOSE NOT YET READY FOR THE MORE TRADITIONAL SURGICAL FACE LIFT..... PUT ASIDE THE QUESTION OF WHO CAN AFFORD TO SPEND \$7,000-\$8,000 FOR A QUICK BEAUTY FIX, OR WHO WOULD WANT TO SPEND THAT MUCH MONEY IF THEY HAD THAT MUCH DISCRETIONARY INCOME..... WHEN THE THREADLIFT WEARS OUT IN 10 YEARS, AS IT IS ESTIMATED, THE PROCEDURE WILL NEED TO BE DONE AGAIN.

WHAT'S INTRIGUING HERE IS THAT NO ONE REALLY SEEMS TO QUESTION WHAT IS DRIVING THE WIDESPREAD DESIRE, AMONG MEN AS WELL AS WOMEN, TO MAINTAIN A "YOUTHFUL" APPEARANCE. THE ASSUMPTION APPEARS TO BE THAT SOONER OR LATER, WE ALL WILL REACH FOR SOMETHING — THE THREADLIFT OR MORE — TO RESTORE OUR FORMER GLORY.

BUT WHY IS SO MUCH ATTACHED TO MAINTAINING A "YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE"? THERE IS AN UNDERLYING SPIRITUAL QUESTION HERE THAT NEEDS FURTHER EXPLORATION,

**AN ISSUE THAT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH BEING
ACCEPTED AND ARRIVING AT WHAT PAUL TILLICH
CALLED THE GRACE TO “ACCEPT THAT YOU ARE
ACCEPTED.”**

**BEYOND EFFORTS TO STAY HEALTHY THROUGHOUT
ONE’S LIFE BY MAINTAINING DISCIPLINES OF EXERCISE
AND GOOD NUTRITION, THE QUEST FOR EXTERNAL
BEAUTY SEEMS TO MISS WHAT IS TRULY BEAUTIFUL
ABOUT US AS HUMAN BEINGS..... PEEL AWAY A FEW
LAYERS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SKIN, AND YOU UNCOVER
A FEAR THAT TO GROW OLD IS TO GROW UNLOVELY....
AND TO GROW UNLOVELY IS TO BECOME UNACCEPTED,
AND TO BECOME UNACCEPTED IS TO BECOME
USELESS.**

**PERHAPS THAT SOUNDS JUST LIKE MODERN
PSYCHOBABBLE, BUT IF THE NEED FOR FULL
ACCEPTANCE IS AT LEAST PART, IF NOT ALL, OF THE
FORCE DRIVING THE COSMETIC SURGERY INDUSTRY,
WE SHOULD RETHINK WHAT THE PSALMIST SAYS
ABOUT GOD'S DESIGN OF THE HUMAN PERSON.**

**WHAT WE NEED IS NOT A THREADLIFT, OR A FACE LIFT,
BUT A SOULLIFT.**

**OF COURSE THIS IS THE SUBJECT OF MANY A PSALM:
FROM PSALM 43: "WHY ARE YOU CAST DOWN, O MY
SOUL, AND WHY ARE YOU DISQUIETED WITHIN ME?"
(PSALM 43:5).**

THE SOUL SAGS, JUST AS THE BODY SAGS. WE MAY OR MAY NOT BE ABLE TO KEEP THE BODY FROM SAGGING, BUT A GOOD SOULLIFT WILL DO WONDERS FOR US.

AND IN FACT, WHEN THE SOUL IS SMILING INSIDE, IT'LL DO WONDERS FOR THE BODY OUTSIDE. AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE AT PSALM 139 THIS MORNING — A BEAUTIFUL PRAYER IN WHICH THE WRITER REVELS IN THE PERVASIVE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HIS LIFE, BOTH NOW AND FOREVER.

“YOU HAVE SEARCHED ME AND KNOWN ME,” HE DECLARES. “YOU KNOW WHEN I SIT DOWN AND WHEN I RISE UP; YOU DISCERN MY THOUGHTS FROM FAR AWAY. YOU SEARCH OUT MY PATH AND MY LYING DOWN, AND ARE ACQUAINTED WITH ALL MY WAYS.

EVEN BEFORE A WORD IS ON MY TONGUE, O LORD, YOU KNOW IT COMPLETELY. YOU HEM ME IN, BEHIND AND BEFORE, AND LAY YOUR HAND UPON ME” (PSALM 139:1-5).

IN OTHER WORDS, THERE IS NO PLACE THE PSALMIST CAN HIDE FROM GOD, NOR WOULD HE WANT TO, BECAUSE “SUCH KNOWLEDGE IS TOO WONDERFUL” EVEN TO COMPREHEND. GOD’S PRESENCE WITH HIM AT ALL TIMES AND IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE, IS ENOUGH TO BRING HIM A SENSE OF INNER SECURITY AND COMFORT.

**ISN'T IT ENOUGH ----OR SHOULD IT NOT BE ENOUGH ----
FOR US, TOO? -----RESTING SECURELY ON THE
“WONDERFUL” KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S PRESENCE IS
THE VERY TRUTH THAT ENABLES US TO KNOW THAT
OUR CHANGING PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, WHICH IS A
NATURAL OCCURRENCE, HAS NO EFFECT ON GOD’S
ACCEPTANCE OF US.**

**THIS IS THE POINT MADE IN THE STORY OF SAMUEL AND
THE SONS OF JESSE. “*BUT THE LORD SAID TO SAMUEL,
‘DO NOT LOOK ON HIS APPEARANCE OR ON THE HEIGHT
OF HIS STATURE, BECAUSE I HAVE REJECTED HIM; FOR
THE LORD DOES NOT SEE AS MORTALS SEE; THEY
LOOK ON THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD
LOOKS ON THE HEART’*” (1 SAMUEL 16:7).**

SAMUEL WAS GUILTY OF LOOKISM. NOT RACISM. NOT AGEISM. NOT SEXISM.

LOOKISM. HE VALUED AND JUDGED THE SONS OF JESSE BASED ON THEIR PHYSICAL AND EXTERNAL APPEARANCE. HE WAS WILLING TO ANOINT ONE OF THESE SONS AS THE FUTURE KING OF ISRAEL BASED ON AN ATTRACTIVE PORTFOLIO AND HEAD SHOT. THESE KIDS LOOKED GOOD.

DAVID, THE SHEPHERD BOY, AT THAT AGE, WAS NOT MUCH TO LOOK AT.

AND MANY OF US, PERHAPS, AT OUR AGE, ARE NOT MUCH TO LOOK AT.

FORTUNATELY, GOD'S NOT LOOKING, AND WE SHOULDN'T BE EITHER — WHEN IT COMES TO VALUING HUMAN LIFE, HUMAN BEINGS, ANY AND ALL OF THOSE PEOPLE WHOM GOD HAS PLACED AROUND US — OUTWARD APPEARANCE SHOULDN'T FACTOR INTO THE EQUATION.

WE ARE “WONDERFULLY MADE.” IF GOD THINKS SO, WHOSE OPINION WOULD BE MORE IMPORTANT?

OUR SELF-WORTH IS GROUNDED IN GOD'S LOVING ACCEPTANCE OF US. FOR THE PSALMIST, AND FOR US, THIS IS THE TRUTH THAT KEEPS US FROM CONSTANTLY SEARCHING FOR QUICK FIXES THAT PROVE TO BE ILLUSORY.

**IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MANY FACE LIFTS WE
UNDERGO OR SURGERIES WE ENDURE, IF WE EXPECT
THEM TO SECURE OUR SENSE OF SELF-WORTH AND
ACCEPTANCE, WE'RE GOING TO BE DISAPPOINTED.**

SO JUST WHAT IS IT THAT LIFTS OUR SOULS?

**IT COULD BE THAT *GOD KNOWS US*. CHECK OUT
VERSES 1-3. GOD HAS "SEARCHED" US, GOD "KNOWS"
US, GOD IS "ACQUAINTED WITH ALL MY WAYS."**

**THERE ARE A LOT OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN THE
WORLD WHO DON'T KNOW YOU.**

**BUT WAIT! GOD KNOWS YOU! OKAY, THEN. MY SOUL IS
LIFTED.**

IT COULD BE THAT GOD SURROUNDS US. “YOU HEM ME IN, BEHIND AND BEFORE, AND LAY YOUR HAND UPON ME” (139:5). WHETHER I GO FORWARD OR BACKWARD, SIDEWAYS, DOWNWAYS, UPSIDE DOWNWAYS, INSIDE OUT WAYS, CADDYWAMPUS — OOPS! GOD IS THERE. MY SOUL IS LIFTED.

IT COULD BE THAT OUR VERY LIFE BEGAN WITH THE BREATH OF GOD: “FOR IT WAS YOU WHO FORMED MY INWARD PARTS; YOU KNIT ME TOGETHER IN MY MOTHER’S WOMB” (139:13). YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT. YOU ARE NOT A MISTAKE. THERE IS A REASON. YOUR LIFE, YOUR SOUL WAS INFLATED WITH THE BREATH OF GOD. MY SOUL IS LIFTED!

IT COULD BE THAT *MY BODY IS A MIRACLE!*

**“I PRAISE YOU, FOR I AM FEARFULLY AND
WONDERFULLY MADE. WONDERFUL ARE YOUR WORKS;
THAT I KNOW VERY WELL” (139:14).**

**HERE IS A MATERIAL, CORPOREAL ENTITY THAT
CONVERTS NUTRIENTS INTO ENERGY, THAT CAN HEAL
ITSELF, THAT PERCEIVES REALITY THROUGH FIVE
SENSES THAT ROBOTICS ENGINEERS AND
MICROBIOLOGISTS FOR ALL OF THEIR TRAINING AND
PH.D.S CAN ONLY MIMIC IN THE CRUDEST OF WAYS. IT’S
A BODY THAT DISCARDS WASTE, TAKES IN FUEL, AND
CAN REPRODUCE.**

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM AND PAIN PROVIDE AN EARLY WARNING AND DETECTION SYSTEM. AND WE COULD GO ON AND ON..... IT'S A MIRACLE!

YOUTH AND OUTWARD BEAUTY ARE CULTURALLY DETERMINED. THE STANDARDS AND PERCEPTIONS HAVE VARIED THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES, AND ACROSS CULTURAL BOUNDARIES. WHAT'S BEAUTIFUL IN LOS ANGELES ISN'T BEAUTIFUL IN PAPUA, NEW GUINEA..... AND YOU ONLY HAVE TO CHECK OUT A FEW RUBENS HANGING IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART IN NEW YORK CITY OR SOME OF OUR OTHER NATIONAL ART GALLERIES , TO KNOW THAT WHAT'S BEAUTY NOW, ISN'T WHAT BEAUTY WAS 500 YEARS AGO.

**THAT STUFF IS ALL EPHEMERAL. BUT THE BODY —
YOUR BODY — IS ITSELF A MIRACLE OF DIVINE
TECHNOLOGY! MY SOUL IS LIFTED UP!**

**IT COULD BE THAT GOD IS REAL TO YOU. “HOW
PRECIOUS TO ME ARE YOUR THOUGHTS, O GOD! HOW
VAST IS THE SUM OF THEM!” (139:17, NIV). WHEN GOD IS
REAL TO US, WHEN WE ARE TUNING IN TO THE VERY
THOUGHTS OF GOD, WHEN WE FALL ASLEEP IN THE
PRESENCE OF GOD, AND AWAKE WITH GOD IN THE
MORNING, THAT’S GOT TO BE A SOUL-LIFTER RIGHT
THERE.**

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT WHILE WE AGE IN OUR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, WHILE EVENTUALLY NO AMOUNT OF THREADING OR RETHREADING WILL CHANGE THAT, A GOOD SOUL LIFT FROM TIME TO TIME WILL ALWAYS DO US GOOD.

DOES THIS MEAN THAT OUR OUTWARD APPEARANCE MEANS NOTHING AT ALL AND WE SHOULD ALL BECOMES SLACKERS? -----YES AND NO. -----WE ARE HUMAN BEINGS, BODY AND SOUL TOGETHER. THEREFORE, OUR BODIES MATTER, AND TAKING CARE OF THEM IS A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE.

WE MIGHT START YOUNG WITH ALL THE HEALTHY HABITS THAT TEND TO PROLONG GOOD-LOOKING SKIN AND PREVENT CANCER, -----WARNINGS THAT ARE FAMILIAR NOW TO MOST OF US ----- STAY OUT OF THE SUN WITHOUT SUNSCREEN----- STOP SMOKING----FOOD AND DRINK IN MODERATION-----ETC.....----- ALL OF THESE ARE GOOD THINGS, AND OBVIOUS.

THE PROBLEM BEGINS WHEN WE FORGET THAT OUR ESSENTIAL WORTH IS NOT BASED ON HOW GOOD WE LOOK..... OUR CULTURE INDUCES THIS FORGETFULNESS WITH A STEADY FLOW OF BEAUTY PRODUCTS AND COSMETIC SURGERIES TO HELP US MAINTAIN OUR APPEARANCE AND THAT IS WHERE THINGS CAN GET SERIOUSLY OUT OF CONTROL.

YOUNG GIRLS AND BOYS PUT SO MUCH ATTENTION INTO PHYSICAL APPEARANCE JUST TO BE ACCEPTED..... MEN AND WOMEN DO THE SAME..... ALONG THE WAY, THE INNER BEAUTY THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO EVERY HUMAN BEING IS FORGOTTEN, AND OUR SELF-WORTH GETS DEPENDENT ON PRECISELY THE WRONG THINGS.

THE PSALMIST WOULD HAVE US DELIGHT IN THE TRUTH THAT WE ARE *FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE*. THERE IS NO AMOUNT OF BEAUTY PRODUCTS OR COSMETIC SURGERIES THAT CAN IMPROVE UPON GOD'S IMAGE, BUT SADLY, WHEN WE GIVE INORDINATE ATTENTION TO THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, WE CAN ACTUALLY HINDER THE RADIANCE OF THE IMAGE SHINING FORTH.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, THE AWARD-WINNING TELEVISION SERIES, *LIFE GOES ON*, FEATURED A CHARACTER WITH DOWN'S SYNDROME. WEEK AFTER WEEK, AUDIENCES WERE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE A CERTAIN BEAUTY IN THE SHEER HUMANITY OF CORKY THATCHER HIS FACIAL FEATURES AND SPEECH PATTERNS WERE THOSE OF A DISABLED YOUNG MAN, YET FOR DISCERNING VIEWERS THE RADIANCE OF HIS INNER PERSON WAS QUITE VISIBLE AND EVEN INSPIRING. PERHAPS, BECAUSE CORKY, LIKE ALL DISABLED PEOPLE, HAD NO CHOICE ABOUT HIS APPEARANCE, HE WAS ABLE TO ACCEPT HIMSELF AND ALLOW SOME DEEPER LIGHT TO SHINE.

THE REST OF US WHO ARE NOT SO DIFFERENTLY ABLED..... WHO HAVE THE CHOICE TO ACCEPT WHO WE ARE OR CONSTANTLY TRY TO IMPROVE OUR APPEARANCE, CAN LEARN A GREAT DEAL FROM CORKY..... THEN WE CAN ALL SAY TOGETHER WITH THE SONGWRITER:

“I PRAISE YOU, FOR I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. WONDERFUL ARE YOUR WORKS; THAT I KNOW VERY WELL” (139:14).

PRAISE GOD.....AND AY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND FOR ME.....AMEN