

**The 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: September 24, 2017**

**Proper 20: Matthew 20: 1-6: *How Is Your Inferiority Complex Now?***

**Preached**

**By**

**The Rev. John E. Higginbotham**

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Our Gospel reading from Matthew today is all about the hazards of playing the comparison game. When we make comparisons to others, we exacerbate feelings of envy which increases feelings of insecurity about our own self-worth. If we felt good about ourselves, would we need to worry about other people's accomplishments, wealth, position, gifts, or whatever? God asked Cain, "If you do well will you not be accepted," and Cain had no answer. The truth is that Cain wasn't sure if he was acceptable or not. And that is so sad a feeling in anyone's life. People who feel unacceptable are the cause of most of the world's great tragedies. For example, let's take Lee Harvey Oswald. Oswald was a chronic loser. Even the communists didn't want him. He had failed at everything he had ever attempted. He was plagued with a feeling of sexual inadequacy. He had a lowly job. He had a lovely wife, but she was**

constantly putting him down. In the same country there was a president. He was highly intelligent, rich, youthful, charming and handsome. He had beautiful wife. He was the most powerful man in the world. John F. Kennedy was everything Lee Harvey Oswald was not. And so Oswald bought a cheap Italian rifle by mail order for \$12.95, a scope, for \$4.00, and some ammunition. Then he positioned himself in The Texas School Book Depository in downtown Dallas, Texas, and waited. So, let me ask you, was the killing of Jack Kennedy political or was it personal? Was it the result of a foreign conspiracy or was it the work of a tortured man who had tremendous fears about his own self-worth? Of course, you need not be a failure to have such fears.

Once upon a time a sparrow complained to Mother Nature, "You gave beautiful colors to the peacock and a lovely song to the nightingale, but I am plain and unnoticed. Why was I made to suffer?" "You were not made to suffer," stated Mother Nature. "You suffer because you make the same foolish mistake as human beings. You compare yourself with others. Be yourself, for in that there is no comparison and no pain." That's easy to say, isn't it, but hard to implement. On TV, I heard comedian Dennis Miller puts it this way: "Remember how good you felt when your neighbor's house got struck by lightning because he got the new satellite dish?" It's hard not to

**compare what we have with what our neighbor has. My sisters and brothers, how defeating can this game of comparison become? I read a story about a man who sold his business for \$10 million and moved to Florida to start a new life style, only to run into a group of even wealthier neighbors with private plane safaris to Kenya, homes in Nassau, and much more. He said he would have been happier if he had never moved to the Gold Coast. It is very hard to avoid this trap. You and I think we would be deliriously happy with \$10 million dollars, and many of us would be until we ran into the person who has \$50 million dollars. Can anybody relate to this? Has anybody in this church today ever compared himself or herself to another and later regretted doing so? Some very sad stories can be told.**

**In a work out at the YMCA many years ago, a woman told me that her family finally moved into their dream home in their dream zip code. The woman and her husband chatted endlessly that at last they would be living in a "ritzy" neighborhood. The wife was so worried about fitting in with the people in that neighborhood she had plastic surgery done prior to their move. This surgery resulted in her contracting an overall body infection called a septicemia or commonly known as 'blood poisoning. The infection was so virulent and so nasty that she had to take heavy duty medication to stop her blood flow. It was the only way she could heal because the infection became so widespread.**

**Eventually she lost all her fingers and toes as a brutal side effect to the loss of blood flow; all of this because she worried about not fitting into her new surroundings. The sad conclusion to this true story is a comment one neighbor made years after the incident. When retelling the details, the neighbor made a stunning conclusion. She said, "The terrible thing is that we are not a "'ritzy' neighborhood, we are just a bunch of regular folks."**

**My sisters and brothers, in this parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day's work, he sent them into his vineyard. The workers would have been perfectly happy if they had not played the comparison game. They compared what they were paid with what the others were paid, and then they were dissatisfied. And that is true of many of us. We have a phrase for it, don't we? It's called "keeping up with the Joneses." There are many faulty misconceptions that people who play this game are under, of course. Here are the two most important: The first misconception is that happiness on any scale is something you can acquire. If I could just have a nicer car, or a nicer house, or a European vacation like the Joneses have, then I would be happy. That is an illusion. If you doubt that, you need only read the story of Maya Angelou's Aunt Tee. Aunt Tee worked for 30 years as a maid and live-in housekeeper.**

**On Saturdays, when she lived with a rich White couple in Bel-Air, she would cook pigs' feet, greens and fried chicken, then invite some of her friends over for the evening. The chauffeur and the other housekeeper and her husband would come to eat, drink, dance, laugh and play cards. One night, the rich White couple knocked on their housekeeper's door. They apologized for disturbing her, and then they got right to the point. Every Saturday night, they heard the joy and laughter coming from their housekeeper's quarters, and they wanted to be part of it. Would she please leave her door ajar, they asked, so they could not only hear the joy, but see it, experience it, feel it? The warmth and happiness that their 14-room house, three cars, swimming pool and who knows how much money could never buy them.**

**In her book, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, Maya Angelou paints the scene like this: "I draw the picture of the wealthy couple standing in a darkened hallway, peering into a lighted room where Black servants were lifting their voices in merriment and comradery, and I realize that living well is an art which can be developed," she writes. "Of course, you will need the basic talents to build upon: The talents are a love of life and ability to take great pleasure from small offerings, an assurance that the world owes you nothing and that every gift is exactly that, a gift." Maybe this is what Jesus meant when he concluded his parable by saying, "So the last will be first, and**

**the first will be last." The first misconception is that happiness on any scale is something you can acquire.**

**My sisters and brothers, the second misconception is that a person's worth can be measured by the size of his or her accomplishments. I hope that you accomplish every worthwhile dream in your heart, but that will not increase your essential worth. There are people who, because of limitations of many kinds, cannot ever hope to accomplish nearly as much as you or me, but that doesn't diminish their essential worth one bit. Both they and we are already worth more than we can ever imagine.**

**About a year or so ago, I read a story about Rebel troops in the country of Colombia often finance their war against the government by kidnaping prominent citizens and holding them for ransom. There were 1,800 reported kidnaping cases in Colombia in 1997. Ed Leonard was one of those 1,800. Ed's company, Terramundo Drilling of Ontario, Canada, had been drilling sites in Colombia when Ed was taken hostage by a group of armed rebels. For 105 days, Ed was held in various camps in the Andes Mountains. Then, on October 6, 1998, Ed Leonard came home. How did he gain his release? Someone had offered to take his place. That someone was Ed's boss, Norbert Reinhart. Reinhart is the owner of Terramundo Drilling. When all other**

efforts failed to free Ed Leonard, Norbert Reinhart offered himself as a hostage in Ed's place. Reinhart himself was held hostage somewhere in the Andes Mountains until his release earlier this year. If you were Ed Leonard, wouldn't you feel that you must be worth something to your company, if your boss would trade his life for your own?

Here is our challenge this week. You and I don't have to prove our worth to our neighbors, to our family, to anybody in this world. Our boss, Jesus has traded his life for ours. That is an idea too deep for us to ever comprehend, but if it says nothing else to us, it should say this: We are of infinite worth just as we are. So, don't worry about the Jones. They've got worries of their own. Quit playing the comparison game. There is nothing in it but heartache and failure. There will always be someone who has more, who can do more, than you or I. Genesis is packed with Divine inspiration and God says straight up to us, we are all created in the image and likeness of God. God is in us, because we are in Christ. We are all the body of Christ. We are Christ and God's Holy Spirit is planted within you and operating as you in this world. So, let me ask you. How is your inferiority complex now?.....  
I thought so. AMEN.