

“Less Than Perfect”
Genesis 3: 17-19

I had a nice thing happen this week. I was at Macy’s looking for a new pair of gym shoes. I found what I wanted (in the kid’s department – I have small feet) but all they had left in my size was the floor sample. It looked OK to me so I went to check out. As the sales person was ringing me up she said, “I’m going to give you 15% off on these shoes. Because they are the sample they’re not perfect.” Well, you could have fooled me. I thought they looked just fine but if she wanted to give me 15% off Ok! The lesson here is that what looks like an imperfection to one person is perfectly acceptable to another. And the person we are hardest on is ourselves.

I remember back when I was in my thirties. In retrospect, I see that this was the beginning of a couple of decades of my life when I was trying to be perfect. The script went something like this:

- Never make mistakes at my job or else I’ll disappoint my boss.
- Keep a tidy house or my friends and neighbors will think I’m a slob.
- I should be slim, blond and chiseled, wearing stylish clothes, and with my make-up in place twenty-four seven.
- Behave with dignity or others might not respect me.
- Be a fun mom.
- Bake cookies so that the kid’s friends will want to play at our house.
- Be the perfect mother or I might screw up my children.

Of course, even if any one of these had been possible, these things were mutually exclusive. By definition, to even try to be perfect at one thing, I’d have to be

imperfect at another. It's enough to make even the most awesome woman bonkers!

I now consider myself to be a recovering perfectionist and I no longer expect myself to be perfect. In fact, I wonder sometimes if I've gone too far in the other direction as I sometimes refer to myself as "the queen of good enough."

In a book called, *Children's Letters to God*, a little boy wrote, "Dear God, I'm doing the best I can. Frank." I think that is a prayer that most of us either do pray or feel like praying. And I believe it is a prayer that God understands and appreciates.

Let me give you the "short and sweet" of what I'm trying to say today, Perfection is unattainable, but the Divine loves us, even in our imperfection. In today's message, I'm not promoting a lowering of our standards. What I will be doing is challenging us to not give up in the midst of our imperfection. I'm encouraging us not to punish ourselves with our failures. And I want us all to realize that failure does not disqualify us from participation in the life and work of the church. If it did, then there would be no one in the church!

The main consistency in my life is my inconsistency. Can you relate to that? I want to be a spiritual person, but the way I think about spirituality or judge myself about my spirituality, is often faulty.

When we think about someone who is spiritual, we commonly think of a person who prays a lot. Or maybe we think of a person, who meditates every day or reads their Bibles or other sacred reading regularly. We think of someone who never gets angry or rattled, who is warm and kind to everyone and has an inside track to God.

Spirituality sometimes has an "otherworldly" ring to it. We picture people who have forsaken the world, taken vows of poverty and have isolated themselves in cloisters or on a mountaintop. Perhaps that is a certain kind of spirituality that

works for some, but what about the rest of us? What does spirituality look like for those of us who live in the city, who work fifty hours a week, or who have a family? What about those of us who are divorced and who are still trying to heal from the scars of rejection, or are trying to cope with the single-parenting of children who don't understand why this has happened to them?

In other words, what does spirituality look like for us imperfect people struggling in an imperfect world and in imperfect situations?

What I want to grasp for myself, and encourage others to embrace, is the notion that spirituality is not a formula – it is a relationship. Spirituality is not about competency – it is about intimacy. Spirituality is not about perfection – it is about connection. Accepting the reality of our broken, flawed lives is the beginning of spirituality. Spirituality is not about being fixed and finished – it is about the Divine being present in the mess and incompleteness of our lives.

What I hope and pray that we can promote in our fellowship at Lake Street Church is an environment where we can be honest about our struggles and find the support and help we need to make progress. I hope that we can be a people who celebrate and embrace a discipleship which is “under construction” like most of the roads here in the Chicago area.

Our discipleship is and will always be incomplete and unfinished. Living a faithful life is anything but tidy and neat, balanced and orderly. Spirituality is anything but a straight line – it is a topsy-turvy and helter-skelter that often takes two steps forward and one step back.

Sometimes when we come to worship and look around at our church family, it often seems like everyone is doing great in every way. We tend to assume that no one would understand our struggles or accept us if we shared the truth of what is really going on. Keith Miller wrote, “Our churches are filled with people who outwardly look contented and at peace but inwardly are crying out for someone to

love them...just as they are – confused, frustrated, often frightened, guilty, and often unable to communicate even within their own families. But the other people in the church look so happy and contented that one seldom has the courage to admit his own deep needs before such a self-sufficient group as the average church meeting appears to be.”

One of the Peanuts cartoons starts with Lucy at her five-cent psychology booth and Charlie Brown has stopped for advice about life. Lucy says, “Life is like a deck chair, Charlie Brown, on the cruise ship of life. Some people place their deck chair at the rear of the ship so they can see where they’ve been. Others place their deck chair at the front of the ship so they can see where they’re going.” The good “doctor” Lucy looks at her puzzled client and asks, “Which way is your deck chair facing, Charlie Brown?” Without hesitating, Charlie Brown replied, “I can’t even get my deck chair unfolded.”

Is that the way life and spiritual life often feels to you? Everyone has their deck chairs facing one direction or the other, and you can’t even get yours open? But if we are honest, then we would all have to admit that we struggle with our deck chairs. We may struggle to get them open, or struggle to decide which way to face them. And when we face them one way we wonder if they are facing the right way, so we continually question their direction and may keep changing directions.

What difference would it make if we as God’s community could be more transparent about our successes and failures? The truth is that none of us are who we appear to be. But how refreshing and helpful it would be if we could be more open about the reality of the struggle to be good, faithful people.

It’s okay to be unfinished. It’s okay to be imperfect. And it’s okay to be honest about that. Spirituality isn’t about being finished or perfect – it is about trusting the Divine to work in the midst of our imperfections. Rather than being repelled by our struggles and failures, the Great Spirit understands and is able to

offer us grace and help in our time of need. And embracing the love, acceptance, and help of God in our imperfection enables us to do the same with others.

Blessed Be and thanks be to the Divine.