

## **April 27 Worship**

**Lead by Dan Smith**

**Announcements/Joys-**

**Time Of Quiet Meditation-** *“Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. “Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.”* Luke 6:21

**Opening Scripture-** TBA

**Opening Chorus-** TBA

**Responsive Call To Worship-**

Leader: TBA

**Hymn-** TBA

**Unison Prayer-** TBA

**Gloria Patri-** Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,

World without end. Amen, Amen.

**Old Testament Scripture-** TBA

**Special Music- TBA**

**Gospel Scripture- TBA**

**Children's Time/Echo Prayer/Passing of the Peace**

**HymnTBA**

**New Testament Scripture- TBA**

### **Message**

**“Defined or Refined”**

The title of my message is defined or refined. This is the theme of a couple sermons I have heard through the years. I hope to tie this into our scripture readings today. The readings today remind us of the awesome love that God has for us. From Philip explaining and sharing with an Ethiopian eunuch, the gospel of redemption and salvation through Jesus Christ, leading to his conversion and baptism, to Christ himself, in the parable of the vine and branches, teaching us that God’s is love and that love first comes from God.

His love flows through Jesus the vine to us the branches. Our love for God flows back through Jesus to God the father, Jesus is in God and we as Christians are in Jesus. We love because we were first loved, and it is that love from God that we should use to define ourselves as his children, beautiful and blameless. However, this is not always the case.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Ken gave a sermon about loving ourselves. I can tell you from my own experience, this is often not easy. We are our own worst critics

because of our memories, and because we fail to understand just how often God uses our worst moments to teach us and refine us.

I will be sharing a low point in my life. I am not going to ask you to share yours, but I want you to think of a moment in your life, where you see yourself as having failed. Maybe a relationship that did not work out, maybe a business venture that went bust, perhaps a friendship that was lost over misunderstandings or outright selfishness, could be an action on your part that hurt someone else or a financial decision that went sideways. We all have had moments in our lives that we are ashamed of, moments that the memory of make us feel like a failure.

I have been married to my wife Shelley for over 42 years, we have 3 wonderful children and 3 beautiful grandchildren. For them I am so very thankful. However, I was married earlier in my life. That marriage failed. My first wife and I suffered the loss of 2 stillborn daughters. This was a time in my life when I was for all intents and purposes a Catholic. Born into an Irish Catholic family and attending catholic school, all my life to that point I had been taught that bad things happen to us because we sin. I struggled with understanding where I had failed. What I had done so bad that God would punish my wife and I like that.

My wife became unconsolably depressed and withdrawn, I numbed my pain with alcohol. Ultimately, we divorced, and I felt even more a failure. What I did not understand then was that God was using this time as a teaching moment an opportunity to refine me. You see God will use our lowest moments, those things that we feel are failures to refine us, to focus us and to bring us to a much better place.

Eventually I controlled my drinking, I married Shelley who had 2 children from a previous marriage, and we were blessed with another daughter. It was that daughter Jessie who, when we moved to Ashby, made friends with the girl across the street. This young lady attended “Kids Praise” the youth choir, at the Ashby Congregational church and Jessie wanted to go with her new friend. This led to our family coming to hear the kids sing and eventually attending the church. It was here that I first heard Christianity explained as a personal relationship with Jesus. That was 34 years ago. I am 69 now so I was a little late in hearing and accepting the Good News of Jesus Christ.

What I also learned is that bad things often happen to good people. We cannot always understand God's plan. The whys are not always clear.

Through my difficult times God was not punishing me, I have come to realize that he was refining me. Challenging and changing my attitudes about divorce, (I was a child of divorced parents) depression, the value and beauty of all children, alcohol abuse, patience and most of all love. I learned that sometimes God gives us a test and then teaches the lesson.

Until I heard the good news of Christ Love. The justification of believers before the father through the redemptive salvation of His sacrifice on the cross, I had a very low self-image. I saw myself as a failure in so many ways. That is how I defined myself. That was what I saw in the mirror. Thankfully, that changed.

What I have grown to understand is that God's primary attribute is LOVE not vengeance. I understand that through Jesus I have been justified before the Father. My sins, shortcomings, mistakes and outright disobedience have been forgiven and erased. I try not to be proud or boastful, but I do recognize that I have been blessed by God with skills and talents. I am good at what I do. I recognize that I am not just a human but a child of God. I will still make mistakes, but I will not be defined by those mistakes. I will not see a failure in the mirror. I will see someone who Jesus loved so much that he gave up his life for me.

So, What about You? If you are here this morning it is proof that God is not done with you. What about the time in your life that came to mind when I asked you to think about when you felt you had failed. Is this how you define yourself? Is this your defining moment? Do you still see yourself as a failure because of one moment in time? Or do you accept that through Jesus you have been forgiven? Can you forgive yourself? Have you forgiven yourself? Did God teach you through that test or are you still carrying the guilt and blame? Have you accepted that in the eyes of God, through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, you are justified, you are without blame before God. You, like all humans, have made mistakes. Yet as a branch in Christ's vine you have been pruned to bear much fruit.

As a Christian, once we have accepted Christ into our heart, we have been refined and re-defined. It's easy to see God's love in others. Next time you look in a mirror, remember this, you are looking at a child of God, beautiful and blameless

before the father. Once you were raw ore. Now you have been refined and transformed through Gods love into something perfect and acceptable. Only after accepting ourselves a worthy child of God can, we truly love ourselves the way God loves us. And only then can we be a true branch of the true vine, carrying Gods love to all we meet.

Regardless our past, let us go forward from today defining ourselves as God does, Blameless and beautiful because of his love through Jesus's sacrifice.

**Prayers of People/Prayer-**

**Closing Hymn-** TBA

**Benediction-**