

The Audacity of Authenticity

On Sunday we began a new sermon series based on a book called “The Gifts of Imperfection” by Dr. Brené Brown. The book’s subtitle is, “Let go of who you think you’re supposed to be and embrace who you are.”

1. Warm-up Question: On Sunday, we also celebrated our mothers, grandmothers, and those who’ve been like mothers to us. What’s something important you learned from your mother?
2. Brené Brown is a renowned research professor at the University of Houston. She’s spent years doing empirical research about how to “live wholeheartedly.” Based on that research, her book identifies Ten Guideposts (i.e., principles) for how to live wholeheartedly. On Sunday, we focused on the first Guidepost: Cultivating Authenticity . . . by letting go of what people think.
 - a. Brené reminds us that we live in a culture that tries “to dictate everything from how much we’re supposed to weigh to what our houses are supposed to look like.” What are some of the typical expectations placed upon us if we want to measure up, fit in, and be liked?
 - b. The Bible says, “Be not conformed to this world. . . .” Romans 12:2. But that’s not easy. The desire to fit in is a powerful human drive. Brené says, “When I am full of self-doubt or shame, I can sell myself out and be anybody you need me to be.” Tell us about a time recently when you felt pressure to be or do something (large or small) that wasn’t authentically you. What did you do? How did you feel?
3. The book of Daniel tells the story of a young man born and raised in Jerusalem. When Daniel was a teenager, the Babylonians invaded and forced many Jews, including Daniel’s family, to relocate to Babylon. Once there, Daniel was conscripted into the service of the Babylonian king, separated from his family, and put into a three-year training program to prepare him for a life of service in the king’s government. Read Daniel 1:1-7.
 - a. Daniel and his three friends found themselves under enormous pressure to conform. They were basically being told, “This is your new name and your new identity. This is how you’ll act, this is how you’ll think, and this is what you’ll eat. And if you conform, you’ll live a life of luxury and prestige in the king’s service.” What kind of conflicting thoughts and feelings do you think Daniel experienced when forced into this training program?
 - b. Looking back across your life, when have you felt under the most pressure not to be yourself? What happened?
4. Brené reminds us of two great costs to conformity. The first is deeply spiritual. Read Isaiah 45:9-12.

- a. What do you get out of these verses? What do you hear them saying?
 - b. Jeff said, “If you’re not being true to your creation blueprint, you’re not being true to God.” Tell us something about yourself that you feel God built into you to make you uniquely you. Why do you think God made you like that?
 - c. How do we know the difference between characteristics that should be embraced as a beautiful part of our God-given blueprint versus characteristics that resisted as weaknesses to be overcome?
5. A second great cost to conformity is captured in a quote from Brené: “We should have been born with a warning label [that says]: Caution! If you trade in your authenticity for safety, you may experience the following: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, rage, blame, resentment, and inexplicable grief.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. Brené says, “Authenticity is not something we have or don’t have. It’s a practice – a conscious choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.” Daniel is a great example of this principle at work. Read Daniel 1:8-21.
- a. The key phrase in this passage is found in verse 8, “But Daniel resolved. . . .” He resolved in his heart to be true to his core identity, then acted accordingly. What were the risks Daniel was taking? How do you think he felt in the moment?
 - b. Given how things turn out in verses 18-20, what’s the moral of the story? What are the benefits of authenticity?
 - c. Brené says that to be authentic you have to be willing to be vulnerable. What do you think she means?
 - d. Brené says, “Whenever I’m faced with a vulnerable situation, I get deliberate with my intentions by repeating this to myself: ‘Don’t shrink. Don’t puff up. Stand on your sacred ground.’” What does this mean? And how does Daniel illustrate the principle?
 - e. In what aspect of your life right now do you need to practice being more authentic? What practical steps might you take?
 - f. At the end of Sunday’s sermon, we watched Keala Settle present the first public performance of “This Is Me” at a meeting where Hugh Jackman pitched Fox Studios on the movie “The Greatest Showman.” If you want to see it again, here is the video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=68&v=XLFEvHWD_NE
 - What did you feel as you watched it?
 - Take a look at the lyrics on the next page. What most speaks to you?

This Is Me

[Keala Settle, The Greatest Showman Ensemble](#)

I am not a stranger to the dark
Hide away, they say
'Cause we don't want your broken parts
I've learned to be ashamed of all my scars
Run away, they say
No one'll love you as you are

But I won't let them break me down to dust
I know that there's a place for us
For we are glorious

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
I am brave, I am bruised
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me
Look out 'cause here I come
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh

Another round of bullets hits my skin
Well, fire away 'cause today, I won't let the shame sink in
We are bursting through the barricades and
Reaching for the sun (we are warriors)
Yeah, that's what we've become (yeah, that's what we've become)

I won't let them break me down to dust
I know that there's a place for us
For we are glorious

Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh

And I know that I deserve your love
(Oh-oh-oh-oh) 'cause there's nothing I'm not worthy of
(Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh)
When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
This is brave, this is proof
This is who I'm meant to be, this is me

Look out 'cause here I come (look out 'cause here I come)
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum (marching on, marching, marching on)
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
I'm gonna send a flood
Gonna drown them out
Oh, this is me!