

Sermon for OCC Sunday 5 July 2026. Genesis 24: 34-38, 42-49, 58-67. Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30.

Theme: "In pursuit of acceptance."

Introduction:

According to Adele Wilde, Counsellor and Psychotherapist from Mt Lawley Counselling Centre in Perth, Western Australia,

Attention from others is a basic and essential human need. Attention in the form of recognition, understanding, and acceptance are essential for us to thrive both psychologically and physically. Often this desire for acceptance is matched by a fear of not receiving understanding and acceptance, thus justifying the creation of a strategy of hiding our true selves and creating a driving force that keeps us from being authentic. Not sufficiently getting the experience of being understood, validated, accepted, considered, and appreciated, **as we are**, can lead to feelings of shame and unworthiness that then creates a sensitivity to having the feeling of being rejected. The desire for acceptance and the fear of rejection informs many of the actions in our lives and the way we live and interact.

The fear of rejection can affect a person's choice in many areas including;

- Intimate interpersonal and marital relationships
- Level of education
- Types of career choices
- Level of achievement and ambition
- Choice of leisure activities
- Our behaviour at work
- Family relationships
- Our role in community life

Body:

Today's bible reading from Genesis is an example of people's pursuit of acceptance. It tells of Abraham's desire to find a wife for his son Isaac, specifically from Abraham's relatives. While Abraham entrusted the task into the hands of his servant, the context reflects more than Abraham conjuring faith in God and confidence in his servant for a successful outcome. Like many marriages, there is often the inevitable lead up period to the marriage, whereby two families seek to establish a mutual bond which is based upon trust, acceptance and approval. For the servant, it wasn't only the acceptance of his master Abraham, that he sought in fulfilling the task. The servant also sought the acceptance and approval of Abraham's relatives in the process. With Abraham and Sarah having left their relatives for a foreign land, such acceptance would not necessarily have been guaranteed. I think we may also conclude that a desire for acceptance would not have been exclusive for Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and the servant. Rebecca (Isaac's wife to be) was most probably anticipating with hope that she too would find true acceptance and love in the arms of her husband and in-laws to be. If we attempt to put ourselves in the shoes of any of these people, we may better appreciate the vulnerability we would likely experience in seeking love and acceptance from others.

Psalms 45, is a complimentary reading to today's passage from Genesis. It addresses the reality for the bride in seeking a new life with her husband and in-laws. It pinpoints this dilemma in seeking acceptance of other people, whereby love and acceptance can so easily become a trade-off or a means by which the other person tries to get what they want. Verse twelve informs the bride "The people from Tyre will bring you gifts; rich people will try to win your favour." The verse implies that people are drawn to the bride because of her royal status. Their attention is connected to her position and influence rather than personal affection. The emphasis is on honor and diplomacy, not

necessarily love. However, from verse ten, the bride is given reassurance regarding her groom. It reads: "Bride of the King, listen to what I say -forget your people and your relatives. Your beauty will make the King desire you," unquote. This verse reassures her that she would indeed find acceptance and love from the king. If we -the church, consider ourselves the bride of our King, who is Christ, we too, can discover the reassurance of Psalm 45 for our lives. The verse could be re-paraphrased in the following way: "Church of Jesus, listen to what I say. Forget your people and your relatives. **Your** beauty is seen through your King's eyes. Your King desires **you!**" unquote. God welcomes you and I, regardless of whether other people do so, regardless of our background or status in society.

Today's gospel reading in Matthew also addresses man's desire for the acceptance of other people. Jesus highlighted the apparent indifference in various people's perceptions. Jesus compared people to being like children in a market place. While they set about to invoke a particular response from others, the anticipated response was not forthcoming. In fact, if they sang wedding songs, their hearers did not respond with joy at all. And if they sang funeral songs, their hearers did not respond with tears or sadness. Such responses would be unanticipated by the recipient and would stifle the flow of engagement between the participants.

Preacher Jennifer T. Kaalund, points out the following: Jesus describes a generation that cannot recognise the truth that is right in front of them. They thought that John the Baptist was a demon and considered Jesus to be "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and a sinner." They describe Jesus by the company he keeps. Jesus, on the other hand, compares these people to children. They are oblivious, like children who are preoccupied with playing games. The Messiah, the one they have been waiting for, is right in front of them. Yet, they failed to see beyond that of a prophet or teacher. In this text, it is clear that Jesus knows who he is, but can others see him for who he truly is? Chapter 11 begins with John's disciples coming to Jesus asking; "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" unquote. We are not alone in our struggles to find acceptance from other people. Even Jesus and John struggled to find acceptance from the people they came to serve. And how misunderstood they were!

How often have you been misunderstood? How frustrating is it for someone to assume they know something about you based on where you grew up or where you went to school, your gender identity or the color of your skin. These are a number of factors that simply do not capture the complexity of who you really are," unquote. How often can you recall how somebody didn't respond to you as you hoped, even to your best intentions and you were left feeling insecure and rejected. I have discovered that another person's less than friendly response may not necessarily be due to my own failing. Sometimes others are so consumed with their own problems that they do not have the emotional fortitude to smile and give me their undivided attention. In my experience, the analogy of a child in Jesus' example is valid, because generally, children are emotionally underdeveloped and are most vulnerable to experiencing feelings of insecurity. I am aware that my own perceptions are still requiring refinement as I seek to grow as a person.

The servant in Genesis embarked upon a journey to find a wife for Abraham's son Isaac. His pursuit for acceptance was a journey. Likewise, the challenge for you and I is also a journey in coming to terms with our own insecurities. Our desire for acceptance can be an ongoing journey. And, our desire for acceptance in the eyes of other people can sometimes be greatest amongst those people we are closest to. Abraham may have experienced that very predicament. I think many of us can relate to such a dilemma, in the various roles we have assumed from the moment we were born. These roles include: in infancy, in our relationships, and in our relationships and service within the community of faith.

Response/conclusion:

Our search for acceptance can extend to acceptance of ourselves. From Romans chapter 7, verse 15, the apostle Paul highlights the struggle for acceptance of self. It reads: “I do the things I do not wish to do, and I cannot do the things I want to do” unquote. Paul wrestled with his desire to lead a moral life while succumbing to sin. We can relate to this dilemma! I think Jesus's words from verse 25 in Matthew's gospel provide the reassurance we need. Jesus says “come to me all you who are burdened and carry loads and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon yourself. For my yoke is light and easy,” unquote. I think God's yoke, regarding our need for acceptance and validation, is found first and foremost in Jesus. Jesus' love for you and I remains, despite our failures. In our personal journeys we can appreciate the love of Jesus who accepts and loves us with an everlasting love. Romans 5:8 reads: “But God has shown us how much he loves us-it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us! By his blood we are now put right with God. We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life!”unquote. The apostle Paul, goes on to say in Romans 8, from verse 35, “Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death? For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world below-there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.” The challenge for you and I, is to not only pursue God's acceptance and love. We are called to extend that acceptance, mercy and grace that Christ has shown us, to all people we encounter.

Thanks be to God. To God be the glory, now and forever more, Amen.