

Punchinello

5/2/21

This morning's sermon centers around a children's story written by Max Lucado, called "The Wemmicks." You may want to read it to your own children or grandchildren! Listen as I read it now.

The Wemmicks were small wooden people. Each of them was carved by a woodworker named Eli. His workshop sat on a hill overlooking their village. Every Wemmick was different. Some had big noses; others had large eyes. Some were tall and others were short. Some wore hats; others wore coats. But all were made by the same carver and all lived in the village.

And all day, every day, the Wemmicks did the same thing: they gave each other stickers. Each Wemmick had a box of golden star stickers and a box of grey dot stickers. Up and down the streets all over the city, people could be seen sticking stars or dots on one another.

The pretty ones, those with smooth wood and fine paint, always got the stars. But if the wood was rough or the paint chipped, the Wemmicks gave dots. The talented ones got stars, too. Some could lift big sticks high above their heads or jump over tall boxes. Still others knew big words or could sing very pretty songs. Everyone gave them stars.

Some Wemmicks had stars all over them! Every time they got a star it made them feel so good that they did something else and got another star. Others, though, could do little. They got dots.

Punchinello was one of these. He tried to jump high like the others, but he always fell. And when he fell, the others would gather around and give him dots. Sometimes when he fell, it would scar his wood, the people would

give him more dots. He would try to explain why he fell and say something silly, and the Wemmicks would give him still more dots.

After a while he had so many dots that he didn't want to go outside. He was afraid he would do something dumb, such as forget his hat or step in the water, and then people would give him another dot. In fact, he had so many grey dots that some people would come up and give him one without a reason.

"He deserves lots of dots," the wooden people would agree with one another. "He's not a good wooden person." After a while Punchinello believed them. "I'm not a good Wemmick," he would say.

The few times he went outside, he hung around other Wemmicks who had a lot of dots. He felt better around them.

One day he met a Wemmick who was unlike any he'd ever met. She had no dots or stars. She was just wooden. Her name was Lulia. It wasn't that people didn't try to give her stickers; it's just that the stickers didn't stick.

Some admired Lulia for having no dots, so they would run up and give her a star.

But it would fall off. Some would look down on her for having no stars, so they would give her a dot. But it wouldn't stay either.

"That's the way I want to be," thought Punchinello. "I don't want anyone's marks." So he asked the sticker-less Wemmick how she did it.

"It's easy," Lulia replied. "Every day I go to see Eli."

"Eli?"

"Yes, Eli. The woodcarver ... I sit in the workshop with him."

"Why?"

"Why don't you find out for yourself? Go up the hill. He's there." And with that the Wemmick with no marks turned and skipped away.

"But he won't want to see me!" Punchinello cried out. Lulia didn't hear. So, Punchinello went home.

He sat near a window and watched the wooden people as they scurried around giving each other stars and dots.

"It's not right," he muttered to himself. And he resolved to go see Eli. He walked up the narrow path to the top of the hill and stepped into the big shop.

His wooden eyes widened at the size of everything. The stool was as tall as he was. He had to stretch on his tiptoes to see the top of the workbench. A hammer was as long as his arm.

Punchinello swallowed hard. "I'm not staying here!" and he turned to leave.

Then he heard his name. "Punchinello?" The voice was deep and strong.

Punchinello stopped. "Punchinello! How good to see you. Come and let me have a look at you." Punchinello turned slowly and looked at the large, bearded craftsman.

"You know my name?" the little Wemmick asked.

"Of course I do. I made you." Eli stooped down and picked him up and set him on the bench.

"Hmm," the maker spoke thoughtfully as he inspected the gray circles.

"Looks like you've been given some bad marks."

"I didn't mean to, Eli. I really tried hard."

"Oh, you don't have to defend yourself to me, child. I don't care what the other Wemmicks think."

"You don't?"

"No, and you shouldn't either. Who are they to give stars or dots? They're Wemmicks just like you. What they think doesn't matter. All that matters is what I think. And I think you are pretty special."

Punchinello laughed. "Me, special? Why? I can't walk fast. I can't jump. My paint is peeling. Why do I matter to you?"

Eli looked at Punchinello, put his hands on those small wooden shoulders and spoke very slowly. "Because you're mine. That's why you matter to me."

Punchinello had never had anyone look at him like this, much less his maker. He didn't know what to say.

"Every day I've been hoping you'd come." Eli explained.

"I came because I met someone who had no marks."

"I know. She told me about you."

"Why don't the stickers stay on her?"

"Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what they think. The stickers only stick if you let them."

"What?"

"The stickers only stick if they matter to you. The more you trust my love, the less you care about the stickers."

"I'm not sure I understand."

"You will, but it will take time. You've got a lot of marks. For now, just come to see me every day and let me remind you how much I care."

Eli lifted Punchinello off the bench and set him on the ground.

"Remember," Eli said as the Wemmick walked out the door. "You are special because I made you. And I don't make mistakes."

Punchinello didn't stop, but in his heart he thought, "I think he really means it." And when he did, a dot fell to the ground.

Most of us would like to get to the place where Lulia was and where Punchinello was heading. A place where what other people think of us and say about us doesn't stick to us, cluttering up our lives and keeping us from living joyfully. A place where the hurtful things people do and say don't mar us. That doesn't happen easily, but the story gives us three clues to help us get started.

First, shedding our stickers requires faith in the goodness of our Maker. Eli was a good maker, wasn't he? He carefully created each Wemmick and continued to love them, even when they ignored him and forgot about him. That is a great parallel with our Maker. *God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.* (1 John 4:16b) It is the very nature of our Maker to love, and scripture reminds us

many times that God does indeed love us, a love that was demonstrated when he sacrificed his Son so he could be in relationship with us once again.

For some of us, this is easy to believe. We have grown up hearing about a loving God. But others of us grew up hearing about an angry, judgmental God. It's hard for us to imagine a God who longs to know us and care for us. But that's the kind of God Jesus revealed to us! Think about the loving father of the Prodigal, waiting hopefully for the return of his wayward son. God really loves us. God really loves you! Believing that is the starting point for shedding your stickers.

Second, we need to understand that the judgments of those around us may well be distorted, even the long-ago judgments of our parents, or teachers who may have said things like, "You're dumb as a bag of hammers!" Or, "You'll never amount to anything." That's because our judgments are often distorted by the warped values of this world. Our culture seems to value wealth, power, beauty, cunning, and athletic prowess above self-sacrifice, honesty, courage, humility, and kindness. It's as if someone broke into Walmart one night and rearranged all the price tags! Suddenly, candy bars are valued at \$50.00, while lawnmowers are going for 75 cents! A bag of clothespins costs \$100, while vacuum cleaners are 2 bucks. That's the way the values of our world have been

warped. They are no longer reliable gauges of what is important and what isn't. So when we are judged by others, we need to keep that in mind!

They may be valuing the wrong things.

That's why Jesus spoke so strongly against judging others. *'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ²For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the speck out of your eye", while the log is in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.* (Matt. 7:1-5) Our judgments are often damaging to others, because our perspectives have been warped by sin. We simply don't know enough to judge others fairly. According to Jesus, anyone judging you is committing sin, and is not to be trusted!

Finally, it is through an ongoing relationship with our Maker that we are able to shed our stickers, the judgments of those around us. We need the constant affirmation and reminder that we are fashioned in the very image of God, who continues to love us and desires a relationship with us.

Seminary professor, Ian Pitt-Watson, once said, "Some things are loved because they are worthy, and some things are worthy because they

are loved.” We are not loved because we are worthy. The Lord certainly knows all our failings! But, like Punchinello, we are worthy because we are loved. And, as we spend time with our Maker, that truth is impressed on our hearts, and the judgements of others lose their power over us. Thanks be to God for this very good news!