

1 John 3:16-24

Have you ever wondered what other people think of you? Have you ever wondered how you measure up in other people's eyes? I think there may be times when each one of us feels the insecurity that we felt when we were teenagers. Why do you think that is? Philosopher Alain de Botton believes we are all looking for love from the world. He believes we are looking for recognition by the world which we believe we can obtain by acquiring power, influence, wealth, and things, but once we have acquired or achieved something our levels of happiness begin to decline. (Status Anxiety).

Have you ever watched a reality tv baking show? Like Spring Baking Championship or Cookie Wars on the Food Network. It seems to me as though the bakers who are looking for their own recognition, the ones who are cutthroat and intense, don't really seem to be enjoying themselves. But the ones who are working to produce a product for others to enjoy really appreciate what they are doing.

That is because it is when we are actively engaged in doing something for others and forget ourselves that the pleasurable neurochemicals in our brains, including dopamine, are at a high level. We're enjoying what we're doing. We need to be around other people, Doing good things with other people helps us to feel good and to feel like we matter. Other people help us forget ourselves and that makes us happy. But our preoccupation with what they think of us gets us caught up in ourselves, which in turn leads to insecurity and unhappiness.

We all have something about our self that we don't like, and that could change with the day. Sometimes it may be we think we have been bad parents, sometimes we don't like our body, sometimes we feel we fall short in the area of our faith, or maybe we don't like our personalities. Everyone has self-doubts, even when you think another person is self-confident and sure of themselves, they most likely are just covering up their doubts about themselves. One time someone told me a humorous story about two friends, Sally and Kathy. Kathy started attending church where Sally and her husband, who were the parents of twins under a year old, attended. Kathy, who had no children, thought the way they cared for these two babies and their older daughter was amazing. Kathy thought very highly of Sally. A few years later after becoming close friends Sally told Kathy that she looked up to her as the person who had it all together. Kathy laughed because by that time they both knew Kathy was just as full of self-doubt as everyone else. You see, since original sin entered the world with Adam and Eve, humans are always looking for a way to improve themselves. We can be our own worst enemies.

Yet our reading from the epistle of 1 John that we heard this morning lets us know that God has another way for us. Verse 20 tells us that whenever we condemn ourselves God, who is love, is greater than our heart, or greater than how we feel about ourselves. The Greek word translated heart (kardia) refers to the self that is stirred by feelings. Our lesson then says that even if in the depths of our being we don't like ourselves, even if we condemn ourselves, even then God's love is greater than our feelings! God is greater than our heart!

God doesn't want us to dislike ourselves. We were created in the image of God, and disliking something about our self borders on sin. Not that our feelings of insecurity aren't real feelings. Some people feel so much insecurity, so much negativity about themselves that they hate themselves. Some dislike something about themselves so

much they want to change it; they feel a sense of discomfort in who they are, they'd like to be a little bit different. And perhaps in some ways this isn't a bad thing, because some things may really need to be changed. But the good news today is that God's love is unconditional. I've heard it said that Jesus loves you just as you are, just where you are at, but he loves you too much to leave you that way. Yet we are still loved.

Martin Luther wrote that "Even if our conscience makes us fainthearted and presents God as angry, still 'God is greater than our heart.' Conscience is one drop; the reconciled God is a sea of comfort". The feelings of the heart are but a drop in the vast ocean of God's love. The insecurities we may be feeling don't stand a chance! We are good enough for God! Martin Luther tells us we don't need to take our feelings of insecurity too seriously when he writes, "To this I reply: I have often said before that feeling and faith are two different things. It is the nature of faith not to feel, to lay aside reason and close the eyes to submit absolutely to the Word and follow it in life and death. Feeling however does not extend beyond that which may be apprehended by reason and the sense, which may be heard, seen, felt, and known by the outward senses. For this cause feeling is opposed to faith and faith is opposed to feeling." We may feel as though we are not good, not worthy, but faith says do not believe it; there is every reason to like yourself. God loves and affirms us!

Feelings are transitory, they come and go, like I said earlier, it may be something different you dislike about yourself depending on the day. God's love is permanent, it never fails or falters, no matter how we are feeling about ourselves.

Faith feels difficult sometimes. Faith feels hard sometimes. It can be hard to believe we are any good when we don't like ourselves, when we are feeling bad about ourselves. But God loves us anyway. When we acknowledge God's love, all the doubts and insecurities begin to fade, for God's love is greater than our hearts. God's love overcomes our selfishness. Allowing God to love us, accepting that God does love us, will bring us back into the path he created for us to follow. God's love drives us back into the world to give away what we have to others. It's like the bakers who bake to bring pleasure to others... they look like they are enjoying what they are doing, not being driven to do their best to prove something to someone.

When we think about this we find that the focus isn't on ourself. The focus is on strengthening the community because we are better when we are a part of a healthy, loving community. As Pastor Jay Mitchell said to our pastor's study group, "The church community is the body of Christ. The life of the body of Christ is the life of the community and through the community the life of the world."

Instead of focusing on our faults, we are to believe in Jesus and to love one another. We are to give our self-doubts to God and allow God to love us into who God has created us to be.

All glory be to God.