

“What if...we actually loved ourselves?”

What if...we actually loved ourselves? This seems like a loaded question and yet it also seems so simple. What would it mean for us to love ourselves...and...if we loved ourselves then what good could come from such a feeling?

In the Mark text for this morning we are looking at the question that Jesus was asked about the Greatest Commandment. This is a reference to Moses' Ten Commandments that were given to the people of Israel. The summation of those Ten rules that all people are asked to follow is in what Jesus says here. If we love God with all of our hearts then we will have no other gods before the one true God and if we love our neighbors as ourselves then we won't wish that we had the things that our neighbor does or commit murder and we will honor those that take care of us. Jesus' response includes all of the Ten in those two simple rules.

The problem with this text from today is that so many of us struggle with one thing or another which sometimes makes it difficult to love ourselves.

During the first week of our sermon series, we discussed the question of “What if...God was one of us?” and we talked about the way that we are made in the image of God. I talked about some of the challenges that we have with ourselves.

Last week, I spoke about how we would act as if we weren't afraid. I talked about the fears that we sometimes have and the challenges that make us unwilling to put ourselves out there.

Today, we are going to discuss what would happen if we actually loved ourselves. For many, it is not difficult to love ourselves. We are happy with who we are. We are good, faithful people who work hard each and every day. But there are some who struggle with what they consider an imperfection or even dis-ability.

Our text from Ephesians is very poetic and meaningful for this morning's topic. We are called to be the Body of Christ both as individuals and as a community. We can be the body of Christ in our jobs and in our volunteering and in our time outside of these church walls and activities. We are also called to work in community by pooling our resources for our ministry and mission together; by

worshiping together; by praying together; and by Communing together and lifting each other up through times of healing.

The Ephesians text says that “There is One Body and One Spirit.” One unique created Body of Christ made up of all of us. As we all have different talents that make us the people that we are, this text helps me to see that if we would all work together that we would be truly blessed.

People that may lose their sight for a short time due to some sort of accident have shown that their other senses are heightened. Within the church, some people are good at dealing with finances and will work with the fundraising and the bottom line of the checking and savings accounts. There are others that are good with listening to people and they might work well in a visitation ministry. But most people cannot do everything. I will gladly help out at a dinner fundraiser, but you probably don't actually want me to be cooking the food.

Now, you may be dealing with something, anything, that makes you not feel worthy or able to be a part of the Community of Faith or you may not feel as though you have gifts to share. Some people don't ever feel welcomed or comfortable in a church. That does not mean that

they don't have faith. It doesn't mean that they aren't believers. It doesn't mean that they should never come to church. It really means that the church is the BEST place for someone to work through those questions. Whether that is through the support of the pastor or at least by being in community with those around you to support you in the place of worship. God doesn't expect perfect people to be showing up on a Sunday morning. God wants those that recognize that we are NOT perfect.

Some people may need to work through things. They can do this by coming and being a part of this community or some other faith community. They can work through things with a close friend, colleague, pastor, or counselor.

As we all work through our differences and our challenges and those things that we may not like about ourselves then we can recognize that we can love ourselves because of the gifts and graces of God. We can love ourselves because we all have gifts to share with the rest of the Body of Christ. I believe that we all love ourselves, but it is when we can truly recognize that love that we have for ourselves and the love that

we can see as a gift from God that we can then go out into the world and share that love.

The scriptures are a great place to show us how to share that love with one another. 1 Corinthians shows us that the greatest thing in life is love. Faith and Hope are very important to when it comes to living our lives as Christians, but without the love of God and the example of the love of Christ, we are nothing. We need the agape love that Christ showed to his disciples. The amazing love that we can show to our friends and family. The love that God shows to us by just being the amazing and wonderful Creator that God is.

Our text in Ephesians tells us to be humble, gentle and patient. We can hear the similarities to this letter in Ephesians from the letter to the church in Corinth. Paul was a wonderful writer who just wanted the people in those communities to become loving, believing, followers of Christ who work together for the good of all people.

Paul continues by saying that we are to show our love by being tolerant with one another. How many times have we shown our intolerance just by not appreciating what someone was saying or by

judging someone before we got to know them or hear what they actually had to say? We need to not only be tolerant of one another, but we need to love one another.

A large focus of this sermon series has been on the way that we act towards other people and the difference that we could make in the world if we were to love each other and share the love of Christ with those outside of our church walls.

The amazing thing about the love that we have and the love that we share is that it is a gift. We have the gift given to us by God. Our 1 letter to John from this morning tells us very simply, "let us love one another, because love comes from God."

The love that we feel inside of us and the love that we feel towards ourselves does not come from this world. It does not come from our emotions or our feelings...it comes from God. This is truly an amazing gift. A gift that isn't just a one-time take it or leave it kind of present, but it is the gift that keeps on giving.

So much of the New Testament is made up of one of two things. It is either the story of Jesus and his sacrifice and miracles; or the

explanation for us to share the love of God that we have received with each other. So much of Paul's letters talk about the unity of the people that he is writing to and the need to share the love of God.

When I was the pastor to a small congregation in upstate New York five years ago, we were a part of the outhouse ministry that was traveling around the churches of that area. I even TP'ed the sanctuary on the Sunday that it showed up.

So, that is where this idea came from. The idea that by purchasing a pack of rolls of toilet paper and sharing that with the people of the greater Leesport and SV community, we are sharing the love of God.

All it takes to share the love that we have for ourselves is looking to see a need. Finding out what the need is, seeing how we can fulfill that need and then putting God's love into action.

What if...we actually loved ourselves? The answer is simple. We would be able to share that love...the love that God has given us...and share it with our friends, neighbors, and those that are different than us and those that are just like us. As I ended my sermon from last week,

I'm going to end it the same way this morning: What if...we actually loved ourselves? Then, we could change the world! Amen.