

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, May 3, 2009  
Rev. John Tapscott

"GOD IS GREATER"

1 John 3:20

One Scripture passage which we often hear and use is this, "Judge not lest ye be judged." People often throw it back at us if we begin to criticize or come down too hard on their actions. "You're not the judge of me. What right do you have to judge?" And there is a point in it. For one thing, it's often hard to judge someone and their actions fairly unless you've walked a mile in their shoes. Furthermore, these words of Jesus mean that when we judge others, we are judged by the judgement we render. When you point a finger at someone three fingers point back at you.

Now this doesn't mean we should never judge or criticize the actions of another; it simply means that we must apply the same standard of judgement to ourselves. And when we do that honestly, we usually recognize areas in our own lives that need some work. We indeed discover that "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory." And so we hesitate to judge others, and we rarely if ever condemn others, and for similar reasons. For when we judge or condemn another, we are holding up a mirror to ourselves. Jesus also said, "Condemn not and you will not be condemned." Judgement, at least final judgement, and condemnation, final condemnation at least, belongs to God. And so we say, "Live and let live," as long as someone's behaviour and beliefs do not harm others. We are often generous when it comes to not judging and not condemning others.

However, we are often not so generous with ourselves. We judge ourselves harshly; we find it hard to forgive ourselves; we condemn ourselves. John writes in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter chapter 3 verses 19& 20, "We will reassure our hearts before him, whenever our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." "Our hearts condemn us, but God is greater than our hearts."

Now by our hearts, John means our inner thoughts and feelings. And often our hearts do condemn us. We think, "I'm not worthy; I'm a failure; I'm an inadequate as a husband or wife or parent." We compare ourselves with others and say, "I don't measure up." In the wee small hours it's so easy to beat ourselves up over our mistakes, our sins, our miscalculations. It's easy to tell ourselves that we've put ourselves outside God's love and grace. We feel that

we can't pray and even if we do, that God will not hear us.

Now it's interesting that John talks about our hearts condemning us in the context of Christian love. John says, "We know love by this, that he laid his life down for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother and sister in need yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." Well, we know that Christians should love like that; it's the very heartbeat of the Christian life and Christian community. But we're so aware of how far we fall short of this love. We hear of superstar Christians loving in such and sacrificial ways, and we know that we could never do that. We feel inadequate as Christians. We even see non-Christians doing acts of love greater than ours and we begin to think we're not worthy to bear the name of Christ. The evil one loves to raise all these of negative thoughts within us. He counts it a great victory when our hearts condemn us.

The self-condemning heart is why this fad of boosting people's self-esteem has caught on. We figure that if we constantly praise one another, that will silence all negative thoughts we have about ourselves. But no matter how much someone out there tells you you're OK, that doesn't overcome the condemning whispers of your heart. I think a major reason people take illegal drugs, and drink to excess is to mask the heart's self-condemnation. Our hearts condemn us, says John. And every sensitive and self-aware Christian knows it.

But John says, God is greater than our hearts. Our hearts may condemn us but God is greater than our hearts. And it's God who counts. It not the thoughts of our hearts and minds that speak the truth to us; it's God's word. God is greater than our thoughts, our feelings. And here's God's word to those who trust in Jesus Christ. There is now "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." All that would condemn us and banish us from God's presence was transferred onto Jesus as he died on the Cross. He was condemned to set us free from condemnation. What love that is! Then God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, overcoming the power of sin and death. And that was the proof that God is indeed greater than any other creature, any other power, including our own hearts.

Of course, we know that we still have sins and doubts and weaknesses and that we are far from perfected, but we also know that are not condemned, because the Gospel declares, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." If God does not condemn you why should you let your heart condemn you? See, it doesn't matter what the world thinks of you or even what you think of yourself. What matters is what God thinks of you and says about

you. And God says that if you have put your trust in Jesus Christ you are forgiven, accepted, a citizen of heaven, a child of God forever. Whenever our hearts condemn us, remember that God, who knows everything about us, is greater than our hearts. God is greater.

This is a truth to remember in all of life. God is greater. God's forgiveness is greater than our sin. God's light is greater than the world's darkness. God's love is greater than the world's hatred. God's future is greater than our past. God's resurrection power is greater than death. God's strength is greater than our weakness. God's truth is greater than the seductive lies of the evil one. God's hope is greater than human despair. Listen, God is greater than your problem. Whatever difficulty you are facing today, tell yourself, God is greater. He is working in you and with you to overcome it and lead you to victory. God is so great that he took on our human weakness, our human flesh in Jesus Christ in order to save us and to be our God forever. God is greater. God is greater than our hearts.

And look at the blessing that comes to us from this good news. John writes in verse 21, "Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him." We can pray to God boldly and with complete assurance trusting that God hears our prayer and in his own time will hear and answer.

One Christian mother was having problems with her rebellious son. He was lazy and bad-tempered. Later on, though outwardly respected as a lawyer, his life was dominated by worldly ambition and a desire to make money. His morals were loose. He lived with several different women and had a son by one of them. At one stage he joined a weird religious sect and adopted all kinds of strange practices. He was very much a child of our times. But his mother continued to pray for him. One day, God gave her a vision and she wept as she prayed, because she saw the light of Jesus Christ in her son and his face transformed. Nine years later her son finally give his life to Jesus Christ. Actually, the man was not a modern figure at all. His name was Augustine, and he went on to become one of the church's greatest theologians.

Now don't you think that those years of praying and waiting must have been terribly discouraging for his mother; that she must have sometimes felt as if God wasn't hearing her prayers, that God had turned from her. Don't you think that her heavy heart must have condemned her sometimes. What had she done wrong as a parent? How had she let her son down? Why had he turned out this way? But she didn't let those thoughts keep her away from God, Instead, she kept approaching Him boldly. And God held her prayer and answered in His time.

God is greater than our hearts. God is greater than we can imagine and we can trust Him with our hearts deepest desires.

You see, because God is great, we don't have to strive to be great Christians - God's commandment is that we should believe in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another. If we obey his commandments and seek to please Him, that's enough. And God will accomplish his work in us and through us. All of our accomplishments in Jesus' Name, whether great or small, derive from God. I sometimes think of how in the 60's and 70's North American scholars visiting the Soviet Union would come back saying that the church there was practically dead. "Soon the churches will be closing altogether," they said, "there's only a few old ladies attending." But then came the change in the Soviet Union and churches began filling up again with young people praising God. For years there had been no preaching in the churches, but powerful sermons are now being preached on Biblical themes. Outwardly at least, those little old ladies were weak and powerless. But God did a great thing through them. He used their faithfulness to preserve his church in a dark time.

God is greater than our hearts; He is greater than human weakness; He is greater than the world's skepticism and doubts; God is greater than anything. And God's purposes will prevail.

Friends, we worship and serve a great God. Because of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ and our faith in Him we may enter boldly into his presence. So let us come to this sacrament today with confidence and faith. Let us be renewed by God's Holy Spirit as we receive the symbols of our Saviour's body and blood.

"Now unto to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can think or ask, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."