

Sunday, February 9, 2020

Psalm 112
Matthew 55:1-12
John 3:11-21

The New You:

Testing Your Spiritual Health in Love

“The New You” has been our theme for the last few weeks and we have focused on how we are new creatures in God if we look to the possibilities of living 2020 as the persons God intended each of us to be and become. We have focused on the New You spiritually, physically, emotionally, financially, relationally. But today I want to go back to the first notion of being a New You Spiritually because as a church focused on the teachings of Christ Jesus, and living out the purpose of making disciples in Jesus’ name, we are called to grow spiritually. We recall that to truly become a new creation in Jesus, we need to take responsibility for our spiritual health. God is invested in your spiritual health because of the love He has for the world, but how invested are you in your spiritual health?

We read from John 3 the favourite scripture passage for many from vs 16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him, may not perish but may have eternal life.” But if we start this passage just a few verses above this, we must recall what is occurring. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader of the Jews went to see Jesus at night to ask him questions. He was unsure about his faith- he was raised as Jesus- in the Jewish tradition and became a leader of the synagogue. But in talking with him, Jesus is amazed that Nicodemus does not understand what is needed regarding spiritual rebirth, that is experiencing the Spirit of God upon one’s heart and changing from within. Jesus tells him that he has been teaching about earthly things and does not understand them. He even questions Nicodemus and whether he will understand heavenly things. But Jesus tries to tell him that the Son of Man, descended from heaven and he will be lifted up so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. The Son of God as Jesus tells Nicodemus did not come to condemn the world, but to save it. People were not believing that He was God’s Son and so by teaching Nicodemus who he is, Jesus reveals how one receives the gift of eternal life. One must believe in Jesus and have faith. To grow in faith and live out Jesus’ teachings of love and life. We are to live in the light of Christ, because he is the one who brought light and life to all. So how are we living in Christ’s light? How well are we living spiritually? That is, in and through the love we have for Jesus, how are we living spiritually and where do we excel or need to focus a little more?

Just think about these ideas of having a healthy spiritual life. 1) My faith is involved in every aspect of my life. Is this true for you? Does what we share and do here together on Sunday influence your life the rest of the week? What about at work/ or when you interact with others?

2) Because of my faith, I have meaning and purpose in my life. What is the purpose of life? Your life? Does your faith help you to define this? At what age did you or have you found life's purpose? What does this mean to your spirituality- or spiritual health?

3) My faith gives me inner peace. Have you ever experienced something traumatic that was such a deep loss that you could turn to your faith and know that you were not alone, that the peace you could experience in the midst of the trauma was there, that is God's Spirit was with you?

4) I am a person who is spiritually committed. I think of the song "They'll know we are Christians by our love- by our love" Do others know this about you that you belong to Jesus by what you say and do and how you act amongst others?

5) I spend time in worship every day. Worship is more than music, it is praying, it is reading your Bible, it is thinking about God during your day and at night. It is taking time to offer God praise and thanksgiving for your blessings. Yes blessings—like those Jesus taught

6) Because of my faith, I forgive people who have hurt me deeply. This one is difficult because we often want to be right and vengeful. We want others to hurt like we have been hurt. Yet what Jesus calls us to do is forgive. Just like he spoke from the cross – Forgive them, for they know not what they are doing. Forgive and let go. Letting go is often needed as well for we cannot fully live for Jesus if we hold on to that hurt, even after forgiveness.

7) My faith has called me to develop my gifts and talents. Just think about your life. What kinds of gifts has God given you and you now are great at doing? How are you sharing those gifts with those who have other gifts—maybe it is leadership, telephoning others, praying for others, baking, sewing – we have many talented and gifted people in this church family. Your faith calls you to use these gifts for the sake of others to draw closer to God and build up a relationship with him.

8) I take unpopular stands to defend my faith. Are you willing to stand up for what is right even if no one else is? Philippians 1:27 states: "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I (Paul) come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you

are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." As Christians we are often tested where we work, go to school and even play. How do you resist inappropriate language or talk that downgrades others? How do you ask those not to do something in your presence which offends you? What about what you believe= how do others know what offends you at all?

9) I speak words of kindness to those I need of encouragement. When was the last time you said to a sales clerk thanks for helping or being cheerful? What about a person working in a restaurant or getting your morning coffee- what words of encouragement are you sharing other than telling them your basic order? Who are the ones who need to be encouraged? Do you recognize others who are in need of hope and for the building up their self esteem and self worth? Think back when you were younger and needed someone to encourage you- who did this for you?

10) I talk about my faith with those who are not yet Christians. Have you ever cited John 3:16 to a friend who does not know Jesus? This is the focus verse often seen on posters and stands or bleachers at football or baseball games. Why? Because this verse explains who Jesus is as he explained himself to Nicodemus, a leader of the Jewish tradition who was not sure of himself or who Jesus claimed to be.

As we reflect on ways of growing spiritually we must also understand what it is that we are striving to do. Grow in faith and in relationship with God –Father, Son and Spirit. The Spirit of God has touched your life—opened your heart at some point in the past—whether years ago or even today, God’s Spirit has said consider me as the guide as you find your life’s purpose. Jesus is the one who made the difference for us all but we must believe that it was his death and resurrection that enables us to have this gift of eternal life. Life eternal with God—going back to where we came from- in God’s presence forever more. God made you for who you were as an infant growing inside your mother. Influences of environment, life, society, family and everything else in this world has made you unique to all the other 7 billion people in the world.

But one thing is certain. God wants you to live and love others for him, by him through him and in the ways of Jesus’ teachings. How Spiritually healthy are you? We are not perfect in health, but as Christians gathered to share and serve each other in this church family, we are on a journey to perfection- together. God is leading us and we are his. We just need to draw closer to him as he teaches us, as we consider others in the world and what we are doing as we

worship Him with our hearts and minds. We are blessed—we just need to figure out how because we know why—God's love for us is deep, unconditional and everlasting.

Let us rejoice in this as we pray together:

God of love as we look to our spiritual health we pray that you would show us your love in Jesus so that we will realize again our faith in you continues and will continue to grow a little each day. May our love for you burn from within as your Spirit calls us to live and love always. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.