

# Turn Your 'I' Upon Jesus

Matthew 10:24-39

A woman was looking at herself in the mirror. "Look at me", she said to her husband . . . "I'm old, I'm ugly and I am too fat. I have a million wrinkles and my hair's a total disaster . . . tell me something positive about myself so I'll feel better" Her husband paused, thought for a moment and said, "Well dear at least there's nothing wrong with your eyesight!"

How we look and how we present to others is important to us, isn't it? We like to be liked . . . we like it when others notice us . . . it makes us feel good . . . and it's important we feel good about ourselves. Let's do a quick poll . . . put your hand up if it matters to you what other people think about you . . .

. . . now, from all those people who didn't put their hands up, do I have any volunteers to come up the front and sing *Edelweiss*?

It matters to us what other people think. It matters even to followers of Jesus. Aren't we drawn to 'what works' . . . we want to run programs that show results . . . we want others to think well of us . . . to like us . . . we certainly don't want to be thought of as 'Bible-bashers' . . . and we don't want to cause offence . . . we want to feel good about ourselves as Christians and we want others to feel good about us, too.

Now, I'm not suggesting that this in itself is wrong . . . that we *should* be Bible-bashers . . . that we should deliberately cause offence . . . or, that we shouldn't feel good about ourselves . . . but, if that's the *only* basis for our lives as Christians then we've missed something very important. For, Jesus says, not everyone is going to like you for what you stand for . . . in fact, being a follower of Jesus could be uncomfortable . . . it could get you into hot water . . . it's not necessarily going to be a life of peace and harmony . . . it may even get you killed. Doesn't sound so great, does it?

But, that's nothing . . . that's not even the bad news yet . . . the bad news is that what people think of us is the *least* of our worries! No, there's something more to consider . . . more important than what other people think of us is what God thinks of us . . . Jesus puts it pretty plainly: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell"! That 'him' is God! Ultimately it's only God who has the power to give life beyond the toil and snares of this world . . . to give the gift of heaven over hell.

So, what does God think of us . . . what does God think of you? Well, you know the answer to that . . . human beings are unique in all creation . . . he keeps his eye on the sparrows . . . and if he keeps his eye on the sparrows how much more is he interested in our wellbeing? . . . we mean that much to God that he knows how many hairs are on our heads! What does God think of us? . . . he loves us . . . he loves everyone . . . no matter who they are . . . he loves us more than anything else in the whole world. How good is that?! Surely that's good for the self-esteem . . . the one who has the power to give us life loves us and cares for us.

If only that was the end of the story . . . if that was all I needed to say then we wouldn't be here Sunday after Sunday . . . hearing the same old story! You see, while God loves us, he can't and won't force us to love him . . . like any good parent he demands obedience . . . but he can't force us to love him. And, there's the problem . . . for no matter how hard we try we won't love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength . . . no matter how hard we try we won't always take up our cross to follow Jesus . . . no matter how hard we try we won't always acknowledge Jesus . . . and it's not because we can't . . . it's because we

won't . . . we will not . . . not your will God, but my will be done! We would rather trust in ourselves and the things of this world than trust in our creator. So, our problem is not that God doesn't love us – he does – our problem is we don't love God enough to overcome the power of sin that separates us. Our problem is God loves the sinner but hates the sin . . . can't stand the sin . . . must destroy the sin. Our problem is that the sin and the sinner are so intertwined that there's nothing we could ever do to disentangle ourselves from our sin.

This is where Jesus steps in. Jesus, a human being like us . . . but his heart totally and perfectly turned towards his Father. Jesus came proclaiming the presence of the kingdom of God . . . available to sinners . . . right here, right now. And, that was the trouble . . . how could God's love be for sinners . . . surely God only loves *good* people . . . surely God only loves his chosen people . . . it's that thought that still niggles away in our minds too . . . surely my goodness counts for something.

So, in the end the ones who can kill the body did just that . . . they got rid of Jesus . . . because he was obviously a fraud . . . he was obviously a charlatan . . . he was obviously deluded. That's what they thought of him . . . that's what many still think of him. Which brings us, finally, to the most important question of all . . . the question that matters most to us . . . it's not: "What do other people think of me?" . . . it's not even: "What does God think of me" . . . the most important question of all is: "If Jesus is the only one who can bridge the gap between us and God, what does God think of this man hanging as a criminal on a cross . . . what does God think of Jesus?"

Our future hangs on the answer to that question.

What does God think of Jesus? Well, he raised Jesus from death to life, never to die again! That's what God thinks of Jesus! this is how St Paul describes it to the Philippians: *God exalted him to highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."*

That's what God thinks of Jesus. And, when we are united to Jesus by the gift of faith we are given a new start . . . a new life . . . a new relationship. As Paul says: we can consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. So, no matter what anyone else thinks of us . . . no matter even what we think God thinks of us . . . most important is that we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus . . . that we hang on to Jesus . . . that we claim Jesus' name . . . that we live in our baptism . . . as Luther did when assaulted by the devil . . . he would say: "You have no claim over me . . . I am a child of God . . . I am baptised . . . Jesus has won the victory for me". That is the truth of it . . . Jesus, and only Jesus, is our future.

We won't always follow Jesus perfectly . . . we won't always boldly confess his name . . . but we can come as beggars before him with outstretched hands and say: "Lord, have mercy". We can continue to turn to him . . . to point to him . . . to insist on *his* goodness rather than our own. Ultimately that's what matters.

Amen.

Pastor John Strelan  
St John's Lutheran Church, Unley  
Pentecost 4, 2026