

# Reassured Hearts

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



*"Four Hearts" by Jim Dine*

## Prayer of Illumination

O Lord our God, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, that we may be obedient to your will and live always for your glory; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

## Scripture: 1 John 3:18-24 (NRSV)

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 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.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – Reassured Hearts

Jordan Blashek, a Republican Marine, and Chris Haugh, a Democrat from Berkley, forged an unlikely friendship while in Yale Law School together.



On a whim, they decided to go on a road trip—to better understand each other and the country they love. They attended a Trump rally in PHX together, road in the cab with a truck driver through Louisiana, went on a lobster boat with a fisherman in Maine, and watched prisoners in Detroit perform a Shakespearian play.

Three years, forty-four states, and nearly 20,000 miles of driving later, they ended up writing a book about their friendship and road trips called ***"Union: A Democrat, A Republican, and A Search for Common Ground."***

I can't recommend this book enough—especially in this politically polarized time we find ourselves in. There were a couple of moments in the book where you wondered—are these guys going to stay friends?

But through the ups and downs, these two very different friends model how to not only **live with one another**, but **love one another**, even if the "other" in our life happens to be affiliated with the "other" party.

Looking back on their road trips together, they saw how their views and positions became more nuanced. They became more empathetic towards the opposing view. They kept one another honest—balancing each other's views and seeing the other's blind spots. They also realized their positions hadn't changed all that much, yet both of them moved—moved towards one another, not against each other.

They realized politics were **never** going to unite them. They saw that politics needed to be put in **proper perspective** in their friendship—but that there were other things that could keep them connected—even though they still cared about politics. Their conversations, their efforts to understand one another, and their desires for goodwill towards our country drew them closer,

despite the differences that remained. They had to tend their unique friendship because it was tender. They couldn't go on auto-pilot with easy go-to commonalities. Their friendship meant something because it didn't come easy. For them the key was hope. **Hope** held the union of their friendship together. And they both came to the conclusion that it was **hope** that would hold together the fragile union of the United States of America.

**They realized only together**, even in their disagreements, could they make things better. They were allies, not adversaries—even though they were different. There's a similar idea going on in our scripture reading. The Apostle John is saying to us, "love one another." "One another" means everybody. With God's love in our hearts, you can love and disagree at the same time—and still be connected.

God's love makes it possible for us to have a **more perfect union**, whether it be with God or with our fellow-countrymen—of all stripes and stars. We can love from the bottom of our hearts. The Apostle John's message is so simple, yet so profound and challenging. It's not easy: "Let us love" he says. Literally translated it's, "Let us go on loving." Let us love because God first loved us. Love is from God. And God is love. God loved us before we loved God. God is our first love.

This empowers us to love not merely in talk, tongue, or theory. We can go beyond lip service. We can rise above and take it to a new level. We can love in truth and action—true love practiced in the real world of our day to day lives in the thick of life. The Apostle is coaching us, mentoring us right now on how to live authentically so that our thinking and actions are a work of heart. When we love one another, says John, God abides in us and God's love comes to perfection in us. And perfect love casts out all fear. We can take heart because God has reassured our hearts.

But there are times in life when our hearts don't feel all that reassured. Like, maybe, now. In fact, how are you feeling right now this election week? If you took a stress test—if you got on that figurative tread mill of life, what would your heart condition be?

**Fearful, uncertain, elated, exasperated,  
exhausted, devastated, angry, stressed out?  
All the above?**

The Apostle John's church was experiencing many of the same feelings. It wasn't because of an election or a pandemic. For them, it was would-be prophets with their competing claims that were blowing the believers off course. They were saying love for God has no connection with love for neighbor. Basically, if you love Jesus, it doesn't matter how you treat others. Their ideas and teachings were creating dissension and doubt in the church.

And so the Apostle John is bringing a calming voice: Test the spirits. Use discernment. Listen carefully, pray, sift and weigh what you hear and feel. For John the test is this: LOVE.

Do a heart check:

- Is God's love at work in your heart?
- Is love at work here?

Immanuel, the good news is whether you're feeling broken-hearted, heavy-hearted, faint of heart, or your heart is leaping or skipping a beat right now:

***God is greater than our hearts!***

God is greater than the fluctuations of emotions we feel inside. God is greater than the chaos and uncertainty going on outside us.

Despite these promises, it's still natural for doubts and fears to creep into the human heart. Totally normal and expected. Our soul can feel flooded by self-criticism or self-doubt. It's that voice in our head that tells us we're an imposter. John describes it as "our hearts condemning us." In these times of second-guessing, Jesus says to us: **"take heart."**

God is greater than our hearts. God knows everything, and he knows more about you than you know about yourself! God knows your **faults, flaws, and foibles** better than you know them. And he still loves you through and through.

There's a French proverb that says, **"to know all is to forgive all."** God knows everything about you, and he still forgives you. God not only knows our shortcomings, he knows our heart, our yearnings, and our intentions. He knows those times when the nobility within us just didn't quite see the light of day. God sees our longings that didn't come to fruition and our dreams that never came true.

So set your heart at rest—God looks at the heart. Our merciful God looks for love in our hearts—no matter how feeble or fledgling it is. But he also improves our heart condition. He pours his love into our hearts. He draws it out of us. God perfectly knows us and loves us. And perfect love casts out all what? **Fear.**

With reassured hearts we can approach God fearlessly, confidently—bold and free before God.

- No matter what life throws our way.
- No matter how things pan out.
- In winning and in losing.
- In waiting and acting.

You see, our real trust is in God—it always has been, no matter the circumstances. If you like the President or don't like the President, our task and calling remains the same. Nothing's changed. We can pray. We can be at peace. We can live life. Walk in grace. We can love God and neighbor. We're free—free to live whole-heartedly. Free to be perfectly imperfect in an imperfect world. We live in and through Christ's selfless and limitless love.

In times like these, God helps us **call to mind** and **call to heart** that we're forgiven, that we're God's children by grace. And because we're forgiven, we can be forgiving. Because we know that God does what is pleasing for us, we have a desire to do what is pleasing to God. We'll boldly run into God's presence, knowing that we'll be welcomed with open arms. God has the time for us. God cares about us. God takes interest in us. When we seek to obey God, we find ourselves in union with God—a **union of wills**. We want to ask for God's will, rather than ask out of selfish motives.

Belief and love go hand in hand—they're made for each other. Neither are sufficient without the other. **Right belief AND right action** are inseparable. You must have **Christian theology AND a Christian ethic**. There's no Christian ethic without Christian theology. And no Christian theology without a Christian ethic. You can't pick and choose. A .500 batting average will not do. We need to be 2 for 2: Right Belief AND Right Action. Belief and love. Love and belief.

When we get in that sweet spot of experiencing blessed assurance and blessed reassurance with God, when we're believing and trusting, not in ourselves, not in our circumstances, not in our candidates, but in the name of Jesus, we're in a good place. With reassured hearts, we'll be a praying people, and through prayer, we'll experience a deeper and richer reliance upon and trust in God.

We'll also love one another the way that Christ loved us. Notice that John says in our passage, "**love one another**." He doesn't say love those who are like you or only love those who like you. God expects more from us than that. Also, love the person who voted differently from you. Love the person that disagrees with you. Love one another—this is how God's love functions in our lives. John says in the chapter before that hatred is a sign that we're living in the dark, not the light. Our horizontal love for our neighbors is a continuation of our vertical love for God.

When we're **believing** Jesus and **loving our neighbor**, we're synced up with God. On the same page. Or as John puts it, we dwell in him or abide in him. We're in union with him—living deeply and surely in Christ. And Christ abides in us. The Holy Spirit in us assures us that the deep and abiding presence of God is with us, in us. God stays with us, we stay with God, we can stay with one another. We experience union and unity, we're united by the Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit helps us fulfill the gift of Christ's commandment to love one another. It's all inter-connected. When we're believing in Christ and loving one another—relationships are at the **forefront of our minds**—and the **forefront of our hearts**.

We can "take heart" because we have a reassured heart.

Amen.

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