

The Heart

Text: 2 Kings 2:1-12

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (Series B, Transfiguration Sunday) Ps.50:1-6

Mark 9:2-9

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ...You will be my people and I will be your God.

Please read Ezekiel 36:23-27

Let us pray

It weighs about 250 grams. Normally, it's about 15 cm long and, at its widest point, about 10 cm across. It is somewhat pear-shaped, about the size of your fist. The colour is reddish-brown. It is a hard-working four-chambered pump. By this time, you have probably recognized what I have been describing; it is the human heart. The heart is a muscle in our chest, one of the masterpieces of the Creator.

In the Bible, the heart is much more than a blood-pumping mechanism. This marvellous little organ in our body beats 100,000 times each day, without us even being aware of it most of the time. Each day the heart pumps blood through 96,000 kms of blood vessels.

Heart disease is the number one killer in the world. Even though cancer is feared more, it is heart disease that claims more victims. In recent years, there have been a lot of advances made in medical science in the care of the heart and heart patients. Open heart surgery and heart transplants are all dangerous and tricky operations; nevertheless, these days it is possible to do what was unheard of a generation ago. The prophet Ezekiel tells us in our text that we all have heart troubles and nothing but a heart transplant will do.

The Bible has a good deal to say about the heart but it rarely speaks of the heart beating in our chest. When the Bible speaks about the heart, it is talking about the **attitudes** and **emotions** of people. The Bible is interested in what makes people tick. It speaks of a **glad heart**, a **sad heart**, a **proud heart**, a **courageous heart** or a **discouraged heart**, a **loving** or **hating heart** or a **sick** and **broken heart**.

The Bible also talks about the heart, not just as the core and center of all of our emotions, but as the core of everything a person uses when he / she thinks, feels and acts. The Bible often says that the heart questions, criticizes, understands, believes, meditates, makes plans, and trusts.

The Bible also speaks of different ways the word 'heart' is used. There are texts that speak about *gladness of heart*, *uprightness of heart*, *a trembling heart*, *a clean heart*, and *a faithful heart*. The heart, for the Bible writers, is a person's whole character and personality. And it is to the heart, this very center of a person's emotions, thoughts, personality, character, and religious life, that God speaks and reveals his will. God says, "*I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord*" (Jr 24:7). With such realism, the Bible tells us that every human being has a fatal spiritual heart disease. Yes, you and I have a terminal heart illness.

We were born with this heart defect, a heart full of sin from birth. Jesus says that out of the heart come all those things that put a person at odds with God (*Matt 15.19*). Whether we care to acknowledge it or not, we have this disease that could be fatal.

This disease shows itself in our day-to-day life. It shows itself in the way we speak to one another when we say unkind and hurtful things, when we criticize a person. This heart disease shows itself in the intolerance we show toward others, the prejudice we display toward those who are different from us, either by race or creed.

This disease shows itself in the difficulty we have in obeying and respecting those who have been placed in authority. This heart disease is evident in the way we find it difficult to go to a person with whom we have a difference and seek reconciliation.

Our proud hearts will not let us seek out the person who has offended us and to care for him/her. Heart disease is a fact. The other name for this heart disease is "sin". It is part of our lives; it is who we are. Even though we are regular members of the Christian church, we are not immune to this heart disease. It can attack us at any moment.

In fact, it seems to strike members of the Christian church with a particular vengeance. You may have your own story (ies) about particular congregations where cold hearts or stubborn hearts have destroyed the unity of that congregation with a terrible vengeance.

I'm sure you can recall times even in your own life where Christ's call to have compassion on those down and out, his call to tell others about God's love, have been met with stony hard hearts that stubbornly refuse to listen. This disease, as the prophet Ezekiel said, is not going to be cured by surgery or by artificial valves or bypasses.

We need a Spiritual rebirth – this Spiritual rebirth is not produced with instruments. God said to Ezekiel, *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."*

This is not a repair job. It is heart removal and replacement. It is a heart transplant. Because of his love for us and by his power, he takes out the old and puts in the new. Defects in the human heart, the human character and personality are not due to the failure of God.

Neither is God happy with the idea that if we do a little repair job here and there, everything will be alright. If we trim back a little here, fix up a few of our vices, improve a few of our virtues, everything will be alright. That will not work, says the Lord. That kind of cure for heart disease never works; it's not getting to the very bottom of the cause of the problem. What people need is a ***new heart, a new character and personality, new thoughts, new feelings, new ways of looking at things, and new ways of doing things.***

Medical doctors are able to extend the life of people with heart transplants and replacements of certain parts of the heart. For a person to receive a donor heart, someone must die. Jesus died to give us a new heart.

On the cross, we see God acting as only God can, taking out the old heart of stone and replacing it entirely with a warm, living heart that loves others. It is the heart of Christ himself that now lives in our heart. It renews us, gives us new life and energy to do the things that please God.

What we need, in the power of God's Spirit, is to let that newness affect and infect everything in our everyday lives. We have received forgiveness and salvation from Jesus

through our baptism. We have been adopted into God's family and so now, as God's children, our lives should reflect that we belong to God, that we have new hearts that are keen to do the will of God.

We say it all when we sing together, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*" We are asking that the new life that Jesus has given us may become a reality in:

- ❖ the way we see things,
- ❖ the way we relate to other people,
- ❖ the way we regard the things of this world,
- ❖ the way we work for God in his church.

Today God is reminding us that he has given us new hearts. The Spirit-filled life that God gives makes changes to the way we live everyday. This new life is ours! That new life in Christ is for us! In fact, if we let our new God-given hearts rule us, I believe we would be surprised at what God would accomplish through us.

- ❖ God gives us Spirit-filled hearts that burn with a longing to see the children of our church and community come closer to God.
- ❖ God gives us Spirit-filled hearts that burn with a desire to see more and more people come to worship the true God.
- ❖ God gives us Spirit-filled hearts that burn with compassion for those who are sick or in hospital or who are grieving or facing tough times.
- ❖ God gives us Spirit-filled hearts that burn with understanding and love for our spouses, our children and people who cross our path everyday.
- ❖ God gives us Spirit-filled hearts that don't make excuses but follow what God wants us to do.

God says through the prophet, "*I will give you a new heart ... I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees ... You will be my people and I will be your God.*"

Black History Month

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Lift Every Voice and Sing # 841
- How Good, Lord, to be Here # 315
- Arise, Your Light Has Come # 314

Let us pray:

Lord God, give us a heart that understands your love in Christ, a heart that accepts your forgiveness, a heart that responds to your kindness and grace with new love, new understanding, new kindness toward others, and new life filled with the joy of your salvation, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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