

Easter 7 B
St. John 17:6-19
1 John 5:9-13
May 13th, 2018
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

A Matter of Heart

“Lord, You know everyone’s heart.”

When you say a long good bye, it is not a jump for joy moment. I don’t know about you, but when my son drives home from a visit, I often stand and watch his car until it disappears from my sight, much like the disciples did when they said farewell for the last time, so far as they knew, to Jesus. Farewells, endings are poignant moments. They tug at our hearts: at once we feel grateful for having known our loved one and are sad that we will see them no more, and again, at the same time, we feel happy for them that they are at peace, apart and away from the struggles of this life, and are with God, enjoying the bliss of heaven. The Angels chide the disciples for staring at the clouds as Jesus departs: ‘come on, get busy, no time to waste, live up to your lives and mission!’

If God knows our hearts, God must know when they are heavy with grief. If God knows our hearts, God must know when they are full of love.

God knows our hearts: Do we?

The heart can be a lonely wanderer in this life, longing to make connections with others, longing for its true place and home. What is the heart? Is it merely a pump that circulates blood through our veins, or as we use and understand the word, much, something much, much more? Is it not the seat and locus of the soul of a human? Does it hold the secret of who we are? It is our core, without whose steady beating, life would drain out of us? It beats faster when we are scared and anxious. It beats more slowly when we are at rest and in prayer and meditation. It beats faster as we are excited, full of passion for what we do and when we meet or see those whom we love. Passion of every stripe is associated with the heart.

It is no surprise then, that the heart is the universal symbol for love. We don’t put brains or stomachs on the cover of Valentine cards, do we? The heart is the symbol of life and of what life is supposed to be about at its core. “Love one another as I have loved you. God is love,” in the words of Jesus himself.

God knows us so well, that he was able to connect our sense of what we value and treasure with where our heart is at. In the Gospel of Luke [12:34] Jesus says: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Consider also these matters of the heart:

Remember the great commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart..." In the same way and with the same heart, we are to love our neighbors.

As I flew home from Florida last night, I could not escape this image of the heart. We flew on Southwest Airlines, and emblazoned everywhere was their corporate logo: A multi-colored heart. It was on the bulkhead of the plane in front of me, on the steward's uniform, it was even on the cocktail napkin they used to serve my soda mid-flight. It felt as though God was trying to send me some sort of message for the sermon!

"A loving heart is the beginning of all knowledge. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye. Nobody has ever measured, not even poets, how much the heart can hold. A gentle heart is tied with an easy thread." George Herbert- Saint and Episcopal Priest. A gentle heart is tied with an easy thread: it is open, it is of course vulnerable. It is pure. It is easily generous, and willing to open itself up to others. It is full of love and bursting at the seams.

A Clean Heart

What's the use of hiding when God can see deep within our hearts, perhaps deeper than we can see sometimes? If there is dirt and uncleanness there, do you suppose you can hide it in some dark corner of your heart? Stone is cold, it is dense, and dark. It is impervious. It is hard. It is heavy. Cast against another, it does damage. Stone is not what hearts should be made of. The dust of stone must be swept from the heart.

We are not to have hearts of stone: we are to have hearts of living and loving flesh. We are to have clean hearts, washed clean in the blood of the heart of the lamb of God. Hearts of stone, I know from personal experience, can be melted like molten lava by love, kindness, compassion and care. "Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts."

Each morning, if you use the Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families from the prayer book, [BCP page 137] we pray:

Open my lips, O Lord, * and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Create in me a CLEAN HEART, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." When we pray those words from Psalm 51, what do we mean, Create in me a clean heart , O God?

We get a clue from the Gospel of Mark as Jesus discusses what defiles a person, saying that it is not what goes into a person that defiles them, it is from what comes out of the human mouth and your actions. He goes on to suggest what a clean heart is not: [Mark 7:21] "For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." So our hearts may either be full of light or full of darkness. A heart that is full of darkness needs to be cleansed. I know I sense the need to have my heart cleansed each morning, perhaps many times a day, and so I pray with very strong intention and petition, the words of Psalm 51: Dear Lord, make my heart a Christian heart, full of kindness, hope, generosity, humility, meekness, mercy, forgiveness as I have been forgiven, peace and most of all, full of love, the love that I have been given and shown.

At times, we can discern the intentions of the hearts of others: [Luke 6:45] “The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”

There is the old line from the romantic comedy movie, “Sabrina”, in which Sabrina reveals to Linus Larrabee, when he asks what people say about him, she says, “People say you are the oldest living heart donor.” Of course, implying that he is heartless. Perhaps, in all seriousness, this is the worst thing you can say about someone, that they lack a heart. It is what you would say about a sociopath or serial killer. Those who lack the ability to empathize with others, lack the basic ingredient of what we would call a heart.

Sometimes our hearts are filled with darkness and not light and these need cleansing to live again and beat freely, not bogged down in the murkiness of darkness. God sees in our hearts and he knows of the pent up angers, heartlessness, unkindness, covetousness, jealousies and the sharp sword of judgment that can lurk there in the darkest chambers of our hearts. But it doesn't have to be that way! That is the good news this morning. God knows God's own and God's own know God.

Matthias had a clean heart according to the scripture we read this morning. He was among those 120 or so people who followed Jesus all around and knew God's teaching and meaning. As the apostles gathered to choose a replacement for Judas, they cast lots and it came to Matthias to take his place in the number of the 12 leaders of the church. Saul would become the 13th later on. No other earthly qualification merited or prepared Matthias for his ministry: but a clean heart. This will be the first and last you will hear of this humble and meek man in the scriptures this morning.

In the Beatitudes Jesus comes back again to this matter of heart when he says: [Matthew 5:8] “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Those who are pure in heart, with pure passion and motive for God and others have been so cleansed. Purity of heart, then is a goal of our personal intentions for ourselves. As Jesus said in John 7:38 : "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.”

What do you suppose is a clean heart? I invite you to pray those words of Psalm 51 every day with me, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” AMEN