

How do we get to the heart of the Lenten season? On Wednesday nights the past several weeks, we've tried getting to the heart of Lent by exploring different parts of the Body of Christ. We've walked with the feet of Christ. We've prayed and felt around with the hands of Christ. We've spoken and talked about Jesus with the mouth of Christ. We've listened with the ears of Christ. We've looked and searched with the eyes of Christ. Each one of these parts of the Body of Christ have moved us closer to the heart of the Lenten season, but we haven't quite reached the heart yet. How can we get to the heart of the Lenten season? Perhaps we can get there by contemplating the heart of Christ.

What is the heart of Christ? What is the heart of Christ's teaching? What is the heart of his Spirit?—the heart of his thinking?—the heart of his life?

In order to meditate on the heart of Christ and address these questions tonight, we will consider seven sayings of Jesus. Each of these pronouncements includes the Greek word *kardia*, which means heart. The first teaching of Jesus concerning the heart which we will ponder is quoted from Mark chapter 7, verses 21 through 23.

Jesus says, "For it is from within, from the human *heart*, that evil intentions come; fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Within these verses, Jesus describes the sinful hearts of all people. If people were *not* sinful, we would have no need to be present for this worship service tonight. But we *are* here, and that's because we recognize that these sinful things *do* often come out of our hearts and defile us. And these sinful thoughts and deeds also come out of the hearts of others, and their actions break our hearts and break our relationships with them. But sinfulness never came from the heart of Christ. Instead from *his heart* came only love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, compassion, good deeds, and miracles of various kinds. The heart of Christ was much different from ours in regard to the kind of fruit it produced. The heart of Christ brought forth only good fruit. In Matthew 5:8, Jesus taught that the goal for which we ought to strive is the purity of heart.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure *in heart*, for they will see God." Jesus was a person of pure heart. And he maintained that purity of heart through frequent prayer and oneness with the Spirit of God. Often, he got up early in the morning and went out to some place to pray, just him as the Son, together with the Father

of this virtuous heart is to love God completely.

In Luke 10:27, when Jesus was asked by an expert in the law what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus replied: “You shall love the Lord your God *with all your heart*, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

For the heart of Christ, loving God was not an afterthought. It wasn't second nature, it was the very first nature. Devotion to God was truly the essence of the heart of Christ. It is because of his absolute and complete love of God that Jesus is also able to love his neighbor as himself. His oneness with the Father is the source of his selfless passion for every person. As we look at every relationship that Jesus has in the gospels, we see that the heart of Christ certainly fulfilled both love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus would have us learn to love God and neighbor with the same single-minded sincerity of heart. He calls each of us to that challenge in the eleventh chapter of Matthew, verses 29 and 30.

Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and *humble in heart*, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

A lot of times, we may wonder, how can the yoke of Christ be easy and his burden light? How can being gentle and humble in heart like he is, how can that be easy and light? Can loving our enemies and forgiving those who hate us be an effortless task? In comparison to the sadness and bitterness which comes with hate and animosity, yes, love and forgiveness is an easier matter. To release our anger—to be unbound from it, to let go of it, and wash it completely out of our hearts and our minds—that only appears more difficult and less satisfying than burying our anger deep within ourselves where it can fester and dominate our thoughts and destroy the happiness in other parts of our lives. When we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, we receive a blessing directly from the heart of Christ. This blessing eases our troubles and lightens our load. Jesus is gentle and humble in heart. In his gentleness, we can receive all the affection and strength that we need to love and forgive others

The heart of Christ is also a believing heart, a trusting heart, and a faithful heart. In Mark 11:22-23, Jesus makes a bold statement about a believing heart. Jesus says, “Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you *do not doubt in your heart*, but believe

Sometimes people hear these particular words of Jesus and they scratch their heads. Others are at a complete loss about what to make of them. They ask and say, “Why would I want a mountain thrown into the sea? I certainly don’t seem to have that kind of faith. Either I have never seen any need for that kind of drastic and complete trust, or I simply do not believe in my heart without a doubt like Jesus says I should.” But we do know that if we are ever to have that kind of faith, it comes to us only from the heart of Christ. We are never able to develop any kind of faith in the Triune God by ourselves. The faith that we have, comes to us only from Jesus, and that faith comes to us from Jesus as a gift of grace. We did not choose to believe, or decide to trust God, but what does happen is that Christ chose us in baptism and made the decision that we would be his believers. It is through the heart of Christ that our faith grows. Whenever there are mountains that must be moved in our lives, the heart of Christ will provide the faith in our own hearts to see those mountains moved.

In Luke 12:34, Jesus tells us another truth concerning the desires of our hearts. Jesus says, “For where your treasure is, there will your *heart* be also.” Our hearts are enthralled and entrapped by the treasures and wealth of this world. The heart of our society, and perhaps the heart of all societies in our world, is the love of money. This is not so with the heart of Christ. He faced the same snare in the wilderness when Satan tempted him with bread for food and security, with a jump from the temple for a display of invincibility and fame. And Jesus was tempted with all the kingdoms of the world, so that he might have wealth and power. But Jesus doesn’t treasure these things. What Jesus treasures is obedience to God the Father. The fortune more valuable than all others to the heart of Christ is submission to the will of God. It is because the heart of Christ is so fully united with God’s will that we can be certain of the eternal life that Jesus promises to us.

All of this world’s cares and concerns really are of secondary importance. We can live entirely at peace even in this world regardless of our circumstances, because Jesus has given us his assurance that our hearts can share his tranquility. We hear Jesus say, in John 14:1-3, “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”

The heart of Christ is good. The heart of Christ is pure. The heart of Christ is devoted to loving God and to loving others. The heart of Christ is gentle and humble. The heart of Christ is faithful and trusting. The

The heart of Jesus Christ has given you a promise. The sacred heart of Christ has made a vow to you, and if you were here for Ella's funeral this morning, you heard it was true for her, and it's true for you, too. Jesus says, "When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

The heart of Christ loves us with an incredible, divine love which exceeds all others. Let us sing and pray that this love of the heart of Christ might come into our own hearts, so that we, too, may love with the heart of Christ. Amen