

Follow Your Heart???
September 2, 2018
Redeemer Lutheran Church
Mark 7:14-23

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within..."

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I attended the seminary, the required reading list included a book by Bo Giertz called, "The Hammer of God." "The Hammer of God" is a novel based on the lives of pastors in the church of Sweden. Although the church of Sweden is officially Lutheran, this novel makes it clear that it is often Lutheran in name only.

One of the conversations in the book deals with the human heart. In this conversation, a young man named Fridfeldt tries to explain to a wise old pastor how he knows that he is saved.

The old pastor speaks, "I ask only what it is that you believe in."

In Jesus of course," answer Fridfeldt, "I mean - I mean that I have given Him my heart."

The older man's face became suddenly as solemn as the grave. "Do you consider that something to give Him?"

... The heart is a rusty old can on a junk heap. A fine birthday gift, indeed!

Apparently, the old pastor was familiar with today's Gospel where Jesus speaks of the heart, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Never the less, what is a very common piece of advice that we hear from our culture? "Follow your heart." How has that worked? Let's look through Jesus' check list and see how we are doing. It's easy to check off sexual immorality and adultery. We have come to the point where most young couples see marriage as a quaint option and an old tradition. Young girls used as sexual slaves fuel an ever-growing pornography industry. As far as theft and murder are concerned, the Canadian government seems to be leading the way with a crippling tax code and an abortion count that now tops 100,000 babies every year who are killed before they draw

their first breath. Our culture says "Follow your heart," and we are rapidly checking off the items on Jesus' check list from the evil heart.

This is what happens when we look to our own feelings - our own thoughts - our own thinking. When we make our own laws, we stumble into the deepest depravity. That is the nature of the human heart.

The book of Judges in the Old Testament gives an account of some of the deepest, darkest, most immoral days of Israel. Cruelty, obscenity, and hardness of heart all reach their deepest depths in this book. The book of Judges ends with these words of judgment, [Judges 21:25] "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Some of the most horrible things described in the Bible were considered right at the time because people judged by what was right in their own eyes. This is just another way of saying that they were following their heart.

This is probably one of the biggest problems in the western world today. People want to believe that human beings are basically good - that given half a chance, human beings will do the right thing. On the other hand, Jesus says just the opposite, "... evil things come from within ..." The Holy Spirit inspired the prophet Jeremiah to say, [Jeremiah 17:9] "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" After the flood, the Lord Himself said, [Genesis 8:21] "... the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth ..." Our culture wants to believe that man is basically good. The Bible tells us that man is basically evil.

I don't like this truth. It means that when I want to do what feels right deep down in my heart, I have to distrust it. Jesus says that deep down in my heart is a source of evil, not good. Jesus says that I can't trust my heart for good. I can't trust my heart for truth. Jesus basically says that I can't trust my heart - that my heart is a traitor within me. Could it be that I don't like this truth because I am relying on my traitorous heart to tell me what I should and should not like? It is terrifying that Jesus tells me that I carry the seeds of my own destruction around inside of me in my evil heart. It is terrifying for Jesus to tell me that my own heart betrays me. And yet, when I examine my heart in the light of God's holy Law, I know that it's true.

What hope do we have against such a severe traitor? We cannot help ourselves for our own hearts betray us and work tirelessly to drag us down to hell. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation by a salvation that is beyond us - outside of us - greater than us.

Our Lord God revealed the only true salvation to King David. King David had followed his traitorous heart. He committed adultery with the wife of one of his finest and most loyal army officers. Then he murdered that army officer by intentionally ordering his generals to follow a horribly flawed battle plan that had an extremely high probability of killing the husband of the

woman who now carried his child. In fact, David wrote these orders down and sealed them and trusted this very officer to carry his own death warrant to the battle front.

What was his prayer when his pastor, Nathan the prophet, uncovered his horrible sin? We have that prayer in the Psalms. In fact, in Divine Service Setting Three, we sing that song after the sermon. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit." In this song, David begs God to destroy his old traitorous heart and create a new, clean heart in him. It is the prayer that we also pray to God whenever we sing those words.

God sent His Son Christ Jesus into the world to answer our prayer. Since Jesus is the Son of God and was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, He was born with a clean heart. He experienced all the temptations we experience, but He never sinned. Instead He took the sin of our hearts onto Himself and carried it to the cross. As He hung on that cross, He paid the price that God's justice demands of our sin. He suffered the punishment of hell in our place for us. We know that the price He paid was more than enough because the grave could not hold Him. His resurrection from the dead shows us that God is now ready to create a clean heart in each of us.

God has a plan for our filthy, sin-stained hearts and it is not to receive them as gifts. He has a much different plan for them. He is interested in taking our hearts and putting them to death. As the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to say, [Romans 6:3] "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" and: [Romans 6:6] "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." and: [Galatians 5:24] "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." When the Holy Spirit begins His work in us, He takes our filthy, toxic, sinful hearts and puts them to death with Jesus on the cross. Then He prepares to create a clean heart in us.

This **ALSO** happens in Holy Baptism. Even as the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write about the removal of the old heart, He also inspired Paul to tell of the new. Paul said, [2 Corinthians 5:17] "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." And, [Romans 6:5] "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." And, [Romans 6:8] "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. When the Holy Spirit plants faith in us, He does a heart transplant. He removes our filthy hearts of sin and replaces them with new, clean hearts.

Now, although we have new, clean hearts, we still live in a sinful world. Temptations still attack us from all directions, and we often suffer defeat. That is when God's Law convicts us of sin and drives us back to the cross. There we once again confess our sins and receive forgiveness for

all our sins. In this way, God keeps our new heart clean until He takes us away from this world of sin to live with Him in heaven where our hearts will never be sinful again.

Each and every one of us was born with a toxic heart. It was a heart that loved sin and hated God. Over time our continuous sinning only made our hearts blacker and more toxic. There was no way that we could give our hearts as a gift to God. Instead, God took our filthy, sinful hearts and destroyed them at the cross. Now through Holy Baptism, He gives us newly created hearts - hearts that fear, love and trust in Him above all things - hearts that turn to Him in time of trouble - and when temptations overwhelm us, hearts that confess our sin in the sure and certain knowledge that God loves us for Christ's sake and will forgive us. These are new hearts that will live with Him in heaven and rejoice before His throne forever. These are the new hearts that God has created in you because you have been forgiven all your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen