



RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

THE WEEKLY BRICK

August 30, 2009.

As you come to him, the living Stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-you also, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:4-5

“Loving God: With Our Whole Heart”

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The Bible has a lot to say about the “heart.” Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Psalm 86:11, “Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.” In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus says that out of one’s heart comes “unclean-ness” and sinful actions. Conversely, Jesus says, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart...” (Luke 6:45) In the Bible, the “heart” is the center of the person which includes thoughts, feelings, and will. The “heart” is particularly crucial for worshiping God. Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ (Matthew 22:37) Loving God with our heart is worship. King David, a true man of worship, promises God, “My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul.” (Psalm 108:1) May your heart be changed, renewed, challenged, and comforted through the worship of our Lord today and all week long!

I. DEVELOPING A HEART OF INTEGRITY

1. _____ THAT GOD SEES EVERYTHING.

Mark 7:6-7 He (Jesus) replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:” ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by me ⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

2. _____ MY MOTIVES.

Mark 7:8, 14-15 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” ...¹⁴Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’

3. _____ MY PRIORITIES.

Mark 7:20-23 He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’²¹For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”

(Answers: 1. 1. Remember. 2. Review. 3. Realign.)

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Monday, August 31st Read Mark 7:6-13

It is the heart and spirit that God looks at (*1 Samuel 16:7; Isaiah 66:2*) in relating to us, and in allowing us to relate to God (*2 Chronicles 15:4, 15; Jeremiah 29:13*). Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” The human heart that is turned toward God receives and sees what God desires: a life of integrity from which flows love and mercy. Thomas A’ Kempis in his classic book, “*The Imitation of Christ*” asserts:

“If your heart is free from ill-ordered affection, no good deed will be difficult for you. If you aim at and seek after nothing but the pleasure of God and the welfare of your neighbor, you will enjoy freedom within. If your heart were right, then every created thing would be a mirror of life for you and a book of holy teaching, for there is no creature so small and worthless that it does not show forth the goodness of God. If inwardly you were good and pure, you would see all things clearly and understand them rightly, for a pure heart penetrates to heaven and hell, and as a man is within, so he judges what is without... If you aim at and seek after nothing but the pleasure of God and the welfare of your neighbor, you will enjoy freedom within.” (Thomas A’ Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*. Boston: De Wolfe, Fiske & Co.).

Let’s look again at Jesus’ imperatives concerning the congruence between one’s actions and one’s heart. In Mark 7:6-13, the particular issue at hand is the substitution of human “traditions” with God’s true intentions. It has been said that *tradition* is “the living faith of dead people” and *traditionalism* is “the dead faith of living people.” As disciples, we must always be on guard against this all too common human tendency to slide into *traditionalism* at the cost of the living Christian tradition that calls for freedom, love, and openness. Biblical scholar PHEME PERKINS is correct, I believe, reminding us that:

The tendency that Jesus criticizes in the Pharisees and scribes appears in most religious groups. People come to hold on to merely human traditions as if they were divinely revealed. At the same time, the very basic virtues of love, reconciliation, and the good news that God has come among us as savior get lost...It would, in fact, be much easier to follow any number of ritual practices than to transform our hearts. (PHEME PERKINS. *The Gospel of Mark*, In *The New Interpreters Bible, Volume VIII*. [Nashville: Abingdon Press], 1995).

Going Deeper: *Psalms 51:10-12, 16-17*

Going Forward: For the next three days, consider whether your spiritual life reflects accurate Biblical “*tradition*” or “*traditionalism*?” What would need to change in your spiritual life to move from traditionalism to a sound respect for Biblical tradition?

Tuesday, September, 1st Read Matthew 6:1-13

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus again reminds us that our actions and behaviors must issue from a pure heart and pure motives. Notice in this lesson that Jesus provides parallel teachings: On one hand, Jesus tells the disciples (us) what not to do and then describes the proper behavior. Starting at verse 2, the structure is as follows: “*When you...*” “*Do not...*” “...they have received their reward...” “*But when you...*” “*Do [go]...*” “...your Father...will reward you.” The obvious difference is who are you doing your “works” for? Are they for God or someone else? Who do you want to be rewarded by?

Going Deeper: *Proverbs 21:2-4*

Going Forward: (Continue the activity from yesterday).

Wednesday, September, 2nd Read *Joshua 22:5*

Obedience to God is the result of the love of God. If we love God and desire to honor God in our lives, we will please God in all that we do. It is in this way that we worship God through our lives as well as on a Sunday morning in church. “Lifestyle Worship” is any expression of our love for God—love for God’s ways, words, and wonders. “When you understand worship [*as a lifestyle*] in its full biblical context—then you can quickly see that there are many appropriate ways to express our love to God. Obeying, trusting, testifying, listening, praying, creating, thanking, waiting, singing, confessing, committing, giving, and practically every other action can be an act of worship when our *motivation* is to demonstrate our love to God.” (Forward by Rick Warren, In *The Worship Answer Book*. [Nashville: J. Countryman], 2006 p. 7. *Italics Mine*).

Going Deeper: *Colossians 3:17*

Going Forward: (Continue the activity from Monday).

Thursday, September, 3rd Read *Psalms 28:7-9*

Dr. Dallas Willard, Pastor and Professor of Philosophy at U.S.C., equates the human heart with the human Spirit and will. Consistent with our theme this week pursuant to the motivation of a heart of integrity, Willard writes:

“The Heart (Will, Spirit) is precisely what God observes and addresses in human beings. He cares little or nothing for outward show. He responds to the heart because it is, above all, who we are: what we choose and have chosen to be. What God wants of us can only come from there. He respects the centrality of our will and will not override it. He seeks godly character in us and for us, to fulfill the eternal destiny he has in mind for us. But on the other hand, he is sensitive to the slightest move of the heart toward him...In fact, God is constantly looking for people who will worship him in ‘spirit and in truth.’ What does this mean? It means people who have free-hearted and wholehearted admiration, respect, and commitment to God as the highest being of all.” (Dallas Willard. *Renovation of the Heart*. [Colorado: NavPress], 2002, p. 148).

Going Deeper: *Psalms 40:10-11*

Going Forward: Are you “free-hearted” and “wholehearted” when it comes to your admiration and commitment to God? If not, what is holding you back?

Friday, September, 4th Read *Psalms 39:4-7*

The human heart is also the place of longing and at times, “aching.” You have heard the phrases, “heart ache,” “broken heart,” “empty heart,” and/or a “yearning heart?” The Psalmist cries out to God that God would show him the meaning of life. Life at times can seem futile and frustrating. Yet we know, deep in our hearts, that we are created for “more” than futility and frustration. Our longings and yearnings are our search for God and God’s ways in our lives and our desire to live more deeply and authentically. John O’Donohue beautifully describes the heart and the hearts “ache of longing:”

“The human heart is never still. There is a divine restlessness in each of us which creates a continual state of longing...Longing is the deepest and most ancient voice in the human soul...longing keeps the door open and calls towards us the gifts and blessings which our lives dream...The cru-

cial point here is that longing is a quality of desire... ‘desire’ comes from the Latin ‘*desiderare*,’ which originally meant ‘to cease to see.’ This suggested a sense of absence and the desire to seek and find the absent one... While we are in the world, a large area of the heart is always in exile. This is why we are suffused with longing. Deep down, we desire to come back into the intimate unity of belonging.” (John O’ Donohue. *Eternal Echoes*. [New York: HarperCollins Publishers], 1999. P. 72).

Going Deeper: *Psalm 84:2-5*

Going Forward: What is your “ache of longing?” How is this ache related to your relationship with Jesus?

Saturday, September, 5th *Psalm 86:11-13*

A “divided heart” is a heart that seeks the ways of God and the ways of the world. A divided heart wants God to be the center of one’s life, yet keeps the human self at the center of one’s life.

“Often, too, reflection upon the things we need for carrying on this life injures the eye of our spirit and bedims it; and for the most part it divides our heart, so that in the things which to all appearances we do rightly in our relations with our fellow men, we actually fail to do them with the intention the Lord demands... But we ought to do good to them motivated by their eternal welfare, not by some temporal concern of our own. May God, therefore, incline our heart to His testimonies and not to gain. For *the end of the commandment is charity from a pure heart, a good conscious, and an unfeigned faith.*” (Augustine of Hippo. *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, In *Spiritual Classics*. Richard J. Foster and Emilie Griffin, Eds. [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco], 2000).

Going Deeper: *Ezekiel 11:19-20*

Going Forward: Choose to do an act of charity (the old Biblical word for love) today or this week, making sure that you receive “no gain.” One way of doing this is to serve and help someone secretly.

