



Sermon, August 23, 2020
 Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel
 Junction City United Methodist Church

Sermon Series: Reboot! JP21

“How Big Is your Heart?”

Scriptures:

(Psalm 145)

I will extol you, my God and King,
 and bless your name forever and ever.
 2 Every day I will bless you,
 and praise your name forever and ever.
 3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
 his greatness is unsearchable.
 4 One generation shall laud your works to another,
 and shall declare your mighty acts.
 5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
 and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
 6 The might of your awesome deeds shall be pro-
 claimed,
 and I will declare your greatness.
 7 They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant
 goodness,
 and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
 8 The Lord is gracious and merciful,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
 9 The Lord is good to all,
 and his compassion is over all that he has
 made.
 10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
 and all your faithful shall bless you.
 11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,

and tell of your power,
 12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
 and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
 and your dominion endures throughout all gen-
 erations.
 The Lord is faithful in all his words,
 and gracious in all his deeds.
 14 The Lord upholds all who are falling,
 and raises up all who are bowed down.
 15 The eyes of all look to you,
 and you give them their food in due season.
 16 You open your hand,
 satisfying the desire of every living thing.
 17 The Lord is just in all his ways,
 and kind in all his doings.
 18 The Lord is near to all who call on him,
 to all who call on him in truth.
 19 He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;
 he also hears their cry, and saves them.
 20 The Lord watches over all who love him,
 but all the wicked he will destroy.
 21 My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
 and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and
 ever.

Matthew 9:35-38

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Where Is Your Heart?

There used to be a slogan that went around when I was younger. It roughly went something like this: “It’s 10:00. Do you know where your children are?” When I was in college, the dorms on campus were hit with a rather bizarre rash of thefts where someone stole the furniture out of the dormitories. Pretty soon signs went up all over campus asking, “It’s 10:00. Do you know where your dorm furniture is?”

The spiritual life begins with a very similar question that goes like this: “It’s 10:00 (or any other time). Do you know where your heart and mind are?” A person’s heart and mind devise their priorities, determine their loyalties, and direct their actions. It is a common expression to speak of appealing to the hearts and minds of people. During the Vietnam war, the U.S. Government under President Johnson frequently spoke about winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. The same language was used by the Bush administration in reference to the people of Afghanistan and Iraq during those military occupations. The basic idea is that the heart will commit a person to a cause or a program or even a person and the mind will figure out what to do to achieve the purposes of that cause, program or person.

Moses understood this clearly. In the book of Deuteronomy, as he sums up the law for the people of Israel before they prepare to cross over the Jordan into Canaan, he gives this preamble: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). When he was asked to sum up the Law, Jesus cites this very same passage and adds, “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39; cf. Leviticus 9:18). The heart provides the inclination, and the mind activates the action.

So here is the question: Where is your heart? How is your heart doing these days? And most importantly for us in this era of social media manipulation by corporate and political interests, who has access to your heart

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and mind? Who and what has shaped how you think and feel about things? Who has instilled what sort of fears and anxieties in your consciousness? What are the unseen forces pulling on the strings of your mind? What memes and propaganda have sunk their barbs into you?

The first step in exploring the Jesus Path for the 21st Century is to take stock of the worries, fears, and anxieties that have seized control of our lives. You see, Jesus left behind a Way of living that is a way to the heart of Love itself. It is a Way of thinking, a Way of living fully and joyously, a Way of transforming human relationships, and a Way of spiritual and personal healing and expansion of consciousness. It encompasses body, mind, and soul. It keeps you grounded on the earth, in the here and now at the same time it floods you with the power of the Spirit and a vision of the Eternal. It transforms people into being the means whereby the prayer “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” is made real. This is what Jesus taught and equipped his followers to become and to do. the same is true today.

Just how is it with your heart? Not your cardiac muscle, but that figurative, spiritual heart. What sort of heart disease are you experiencing? What has wounded your heart? What has taken control?

The Healthy Heart

Jesus healed hearts as well as bodies. Compassion and forgiveness and love are what heal hearts. In today’s Scripture reading, we find these words: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” The compassion of Jesus moved him physically – it was a visceral response to the world he encountered. In fact, the Greek word that we translate as “to have compassion for,” actually means to be moved in the bowels, because the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity. So, you could say that he felt it in his gut.

Healthy hearts are compassionate, empathetic, ready to forgive and reconcile, and seek justice for all persons. As we become more globally

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aware and connected, it is imperative that we cultivate greater compassion and seek justice in our world. Bigger Mind consciousness leads directly into Bigger Heart compassion and justice. Jesus looks out on the teeming crowds and is moved deeply within. He teaches them, heals them, and feeds them. From the example and teaching of Jesus comes my basic definition of justice: doing that which ensures that all persons have the potential and opportunity to live lives of meaning and purpose, have unfettered access to the basic necessities of life, are free to choose the material and social conditions of their life and have equal power to influence political, and social decision-making processes. Compassion feeds into justice, because we see and feel deeply in our guts the suffering and struggle of persons in societies that allow inequities, discrimination, and exploitation to exist.

You know, there are a lot of hymns and songs about the deep, deep love of Jesus. And Jesus' love for the world is very deep. But we interpret that love too shallowly. It isn't a love just for us alone. It is a love that brings healing to our hearts and lives, and is meant to then overflow into the world through our love and compassion for others. Jesus loves you in order to help you shake off the chains of bitterness or guilt or self-recrimination or anger or fear that are binding and burdening you. Jesus floods your heart with love and forgiveness so that your heart will grow. That's the Jesus Path for the 21st Century: Bigger Mind, Bigger Heart, Bigger World, Bigger life.

The Bigger Heart

So, my friends, know that you are forgiven and loved immensely by a God who chooses to love you rather than judge you, who chooses to heal you in every way possible rather than inflict pain upon you, who knows our frames and frailties and who chooses to strengthen us and instruct us in every way possible so that we will bloom fully and to be as fruitful and abundant as possible in our living. Hear these words from today's Psalm:

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⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹ The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.

¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.

¹⁶ You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.

¹⁷ The Lord is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.

¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;
he also hears their cry, and saves them.

God is by your side, God is on your side. God is for you. Please take these words into your heart. Annie Dillard says that God is a God of the extravagant gesture. God wishes extravagant health and wellness and good things for you – for all of you – for all of us – for all the world. Everyone. Jesus loves you extravagantly, so you can love the world. And that’s what the world needs in the 21st Century.