

Dear Friends in Christ,

The text for this morning called to mind the members of this congregation who have experienced a heart catheterization procedure, simply referred to as a *heart cath*. It's a procedure that allows the doctors to see what's going on in the heart and blood vessels. A number of you who have experienced this are sitting here this morning.

I thought about that in light of the words of our text, "for he himself knew what was in man." (vs. 25b) And I connected those words to these words of Jesus: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." (Matt. 15: 19)

This morning we are to receive . . .

A SPIRITUAL HEART CATH

I. The Meaning of "Believe".

A *spiritual heart cath* from the Lord begins with an understanding of what the word "believed" means as in, "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many *believed* in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing." (vs. 23) *Believed in his name*.

Commentator Gary Baumler writes of the people who were running after Jesus, "What they knew about Jesus, that is, his name, led them to trust him. The signs had an effect. People began to trust in Jesus as a great prophet or even the Messiah." (Gary P. Baumler, *John, People's Bible Commentary*, CPH, St. Louis, 1997, p. 47)

We all remember the feeding of the five thousand. Following that miracle, we're told, "When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'" (John 6:14) Well, based on the fact that He filled their stomachs, they *believed* He was a great prophet. That belief had nothing to do with their sin and need of a payment for sin. It had everything to do with their comfort and happiness with this world.

In fact, on reading the next statement from the miracle of the feeding we're told, "Perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself." (Jn. 6:15) Oh, they believed, alright! Jesus was a prophet and they would make Him their king by force - to make them happy with this world. But that just doesn't fit with His words, "In the world you will have tribulation." (Jn. 16:33)

A *spiritual heart cath* from the Lord begins with an understanding of why Christ came into this world in the first place. It's bound in these words of Jesus to all humanity:

"You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." (Jn. 8:24)

And that's it. To "believe" is not simply to believe that Christ is the One Who came into this world to die on a cross and pay for sins. To believe is to trust that Christ is the One Who came into the world and paid for **your** sins - for me to trust that He paid for **my** sins. To trust that He has done everything for our eternal salvation. It's the simplicity of the Scripture promise: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God..." (Eph. 2:8a)

And just in case anyone starts thinking we have to do something to make up to God because of the things we should not think and say and do - just in case we start thinking that way, the Scriptures go on to say that this salvation of God is "not a result of works (any contribution we have made) - not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:9)

A spiritual heart cath from God is a diagnosis of our sin, how we think, what we believe and always points us in the right direction; namely, the one that leads to everlasting life.

II. Does Not Trust Himself to Man's Thinking.

I recalled an experience I had, quite some years ago, in the old Emergency Room at Decatur Memorial Hospital. In that day, the rooms were very small and divided by cloth curtain walls. Consequently, you could hear the conversations of those next to you.

There was a patient in the room next to me who had been dealing with chest pains since the day before. He was in his early 30's. As much as I didn't really want to hear the conversation, I recall the ER doctor asking the patient if he was a smoker. He said he was, but that he had quit. The doctor asked, "And how long ago did you quit?" The patient answered, "Yesterday" (the day the chest pains started!). I thought to myself, "Friend, you're about to take a trip!" Well, this was before DMH was doing extensive heart procedures, so about 20 minutes later they packed him up and shipped him off to Springfield by way of ambulance.

I got to thinking about how we humans run a course of life doing all sorts of things that are not beneficial, not giving much thought to them, and then, all of a sudden, they catch up with us. What's amazing is how we justify the wrong things we think and say and do.

So, our text says of humans, "But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people..." (vs. 24) The fact is, centuries earlier, God said through Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9) And, then, God impresses this truth upon us - what we might call the spiritual heart cath procedure: "I the Lord search the heart..." (Jer. 17:10)

Humans can think God might be impressed with them, but the words scream at us, again, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick..." We can never, and must never, minimize what sin is and what it does to God, ourselves and others. If I may, once more, quote Baumler:

To this day, some who profess trust in Jesus have reservations or misdirected expectations. There are hypocrites in our churches. Now, as then, other people cannot adequately judge who they are. But Jesus knows their hearts. (Baumler, John, p. 48)

III. Knows What's in Man.

In fact, *a spiritual heart cath* from the Lord concludes with this reality from our text: "(He) needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man." (vs. 25) He knew what was in man and He knows what is in man because He is God who "search(es) the heart...". Nothing is hidden from God, including the multitude of moments when we rationalize and try to convince ourselves that the wrongs we think and say and do are justified.

The fact is, we know the remedy and we know it is all dependent on the love of God for us in Christ. It begins with confession of our sin - daily confession. The words of David:

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me (ever!). Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment... Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. (Psalm 51:3,4,9)

It's an honest confession! All sin, no matter what it is and who, of this world it's against, is first and foremost against God: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight..."

All sin, regardless of how we see it, should cause us to cry out, "Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me." (Ps. 51:11) And that sin acknowledges, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit (and a contrite heart)..." (Ps. 51:17a) It's the best we can offer! It's the only thing we can give to God. Not our perceived good works. Not our efforts to make-up to God. Just this: A Broken Spirit. No, that does not set well with the arrogant or self-righteous. It never has. It never will. But it is all that we can give - and what God will accept.

And with it comes the promise, "...a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Ps. 51:17b) This is what we daily lay before the eternal Triune God. For the sake of Jesus He will not despise it - ever.

The healing God gives to those receiving His heart cath is given to us this way: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation (the sacrifice) for our sins." (I John 4:9) And if you believe that, then, friend, you've been given the cure: "...whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16)

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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St. John 2:23-25: ***“A Spiritual Heart Cath”***

- I. The Meaning of “Believe”.*
- II. Does Not Trust Himself to Man’s Thinking.*
- III. Knows What’s in Man.*

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