

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The former director of the Seminary Chorus once told of a time in his past where he was on a plane reading a book on homiletics. The passenger in the seat next to him asked what he was reading, and he told them. They asked him, "What's homiletics?" So, he went on to explain that homiletics is the study of preaching—what to preach, how to preach, why to preach, etc. As he was explaining this, a look of confusion developed on the passenger's face, and when the director finished his explanation, they asked, "Why don't you preach from the heart?" "Because I know what's in there, and it's not good," he replied.

Jesus said,

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, and they defile a person.

I can identify with Rev. Gerike on many things, and especially the point he made to his neighbor that day. Preaching to you from my heart would do you no good because of the evil therein. You would not receive Jesus, except as a new law-bringer and an example to attempt to live up to. You would not hear about the forgiveness of your sins, but receive some lesson on self-justification and self-preservation. You would not receive life and salvation but a way which inevitably leads to death and damnation. I would be sharing my guilt with you, covering you with my guilt, and taking you all to hell right along with me.

I've borne my heart to you, generally speaking, and you should be able to identify with me. After all, the law of God is this, "[Out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness." It is not only my heart which issues these things, but the heart of all men. As St. Paul wrote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Why have all sinned? Because from all human hearts "come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness;" from all human hearts proceed sin. "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."

It can be a wonder then, that there are Christians who like to use the phrase, "I gave my heart to Jesus." Hearing that, and knowing what Jesus said in today's Gospel, one wonders why He would want such a despicable thing. Human hearts are vile and grotesque, full of all kinds of evil, full of all kinds of sins. What is Jesus supposed to do with it?

Given what Jesus said in today's text, if you come at the phrase, "Gave my heart to Jesus," as some sort of decision theology, it's a wonder that anyone, let alone a Christian, might say anything like that. It's foolishness to proclaim that one has made the choice to follow Jesus, to be His disciple, to become a son of God. Maybe they mean something else by that...

Which is a reason why I would warn you against walking up to one such as these and calling them a fool. Dear hearers, another reason is because thinking like that is also an evil thought. Do not think too highly of yourselves, for your hearts are as dark and vile as your fellow Christians who "gave their hearts to Jesus." And you, too, can and will, from time to time, speak of your being a Christian as having something to do with you—whether that be your believing in Jesus, your confession of sins, or your confession of the faith. After all, this is all stuff you "believe with your heart and confess with your mouth." (cf. Romans 10:9)

Don't think for a minute that your faith or confession is supposed to come from you, with your vile, grotesque, dark, sin-filled heart! "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." It follows that if what comes out of a man defiles him, then nothing that comes out of him purifies him or shows him to be pure. In other words, there is nothing

that you do, from your heart, which draws you closer to Jesus, makes you one with Jesus...saves you. So, what does St. Paul mean?

[I]f you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

"There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him...whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled..." The thinking may be that if what comes out of a man defiles him then there must be something that he can put into himself which works the opposite. That's just as wrong, as Jesus here said. What you put into yourself does not enter your heart, but your stomach; eventually this is eliminated. At the risk of adding to Jesus' words, what you put into yourselves enters the lungs and is quickly eliminated before the next breath.

These things do not reach the heart, where the vileness of man resides. And even if they could, they have no power to purify that place from which proceeds "evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness." Let me put it another way: you cannot place anything into you that makes its way to your vile heart in order to purify it. What you place there only further proves its insatiable appetite for sin.

So, while it's correct to think of any flavor of decision theology as false theology, and any statement to the effect of asking Jesus into one's heart as a poor expression of faith, at best, so you ought also be warned that all of the evil thoughts you have of them do more to condemn you than help them. Now, I don't mean to give credence to the false doctrine that is decision theology, but I do mean to say that your hearts are just as vile, dark, and grotesque as the hearts of those who "invited Jesus" to be there.

So, again, it must be asked, what did St. Paul mean?

[I]f you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Let me put it to you this way. Nothing you place into yourselves purifies your hearts. This is what Jesus is saying: it's not about you, it's about Him. So it is that St. Paul was inspired to write to the Romans, Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way..."The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:1-6a, 8b-10)

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)." "Faith comes by hearing," he also wrote, "and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17) It's not about you, it's about Jesus. You didn't give your heart to Jesus, you didn't invite Jesus into your heart; on the contrary, Jesus took the defilement from your heart, from the hearts of all men, and died with that defilement, that sin, on the cross. That's why Paul said, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) That is the goal of all preaching: that the Word of God be proclaimed to you in all purity, that you would come to know, again and again, Jesus Christ crucified for you!

So again, I tell you, Jesus took what was in your heart, in the hearts of all men dead, alive, and to be born—all “evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness”—becoming the most defiled person creation has ever known and sacrificed Himself on the altar of Golgotha upon which His cross was planted. Nailed to the cross, Jesus shed His blood and died as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. (cf. 1 John 2:2) Jesus Christ is the Savior of all men...

...And especially of them that believe. Yes, dear hearers, Jesus Christ is your Savior. He was crucified and died for you, and shed His blood for the propitiation of your sins, even as His side was pierced after He died, from which wound flowed water and blood—those signs which mark the purification and recreation of your vile, grotesque, dark, dead hearts. He has taken the vileness and sin from you; He has taken your vile, grotesque, and dark hearts from you and was crucified with them, and given you a new heart, even as the Psalmist sings (cf. Psalm 51:10), and you repeat in the Offertory—created a new heart in which He is now present, crucified and risen. The Word of God is near you...in your heart. He creates a new heart and places Himself there and in your fellow Christians by means: as He is combined with water that is poured over your heads or into which you were dunked, as the Word is proclaimed into your ears (this very Word of God as well as the words of Holy Absolution), and as He gives to you his very body and blood shed in the forms of bread and wine for your consumption. Jesus is present in these means in order that He would be present in your hearts.

“But, wait a minute, pastor,” you might be thinking. “Didn’t you just say we can’t put anything into ourselves to purify ourselves?” Yes, I did, exactly. So, how does that line up with the Lord’s Supper? Well, the Lutheran Church believes, teaches, and confesses the Sacraments to be works of God. So, when the pastor baptizes you, God is at work in the hands of that pastor, in the water, by the Word, to forgive that person and give them New Life. Likewise, while the pastor speaks the Words of Institution over the bread and the wine, and you take the bread and wine and eat it and drink it, God is at work in those means to give Himself, body and blood to you, for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Therefore, by the presence of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, in your mouths and in your hearts, you confess Him and believe that God raised Him from the dead, believing unto righteousness from a risen, cleansed, new heart, confessing unto salvation with lips made clean by the Gospel of Christ as if by coals from a fire. (cf. Isaiah 6:6-7) That is the way it works with the hearts of men unto salvation—they die and rise with Christ.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:3-7)

Dear hearers, by baptism into Christ Jesus, you have died and risen with Him. It is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you; the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God who loves you and gave Himself for you. (cf. Galatians 2:20) It’s not about you, what you do, but it is about you, what was done for you. Oh, you still have darkness and vileness in your hearts—there is a war that wages in you between your old man and the new—but you live by God-given faith, in the sure and certain knowledge that Christ Jesus is in your heart, He has placed Himself there, that you have died and risen with Him; therefore, you are a new creation, and you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.