

Sunday 13th May State of Heart
Ezekiel 36:24-28 Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 John 17:6-19

Intro: What state is your heart in?

Poignant ! Several of us know first hand what it is like to have a heart that is not working properly Most of us know someone who has had, if not a complete heart replaced then major repair or parts of their heart repaired!

At centre of each of our readings today is the state of our spiritual heart, not just as individuals but also as God's whole body - the church

Ezekiel passage, a prophecy given by God to his scattered people - Israel - is that he is going to give them a new heart. He will 'remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh' vs.26

We know the difference a healthy heart makes

- When calcified or hardened through disease it doesn't work properly and we get breathless or pain or...
- When healthy and soft and strong the heart muscle can pump blood around efficiently and we have energy and life

God promised the people of Israel a new heart of stone

The old covenant of God with His people was based on the 10 commandments. What were these written on? Heart of STONE

The new covenant is centred upon Jesus death and resurrection - Jesus The Word that became FLESH

Way back in the days of Ezekiel, almost 600 years before Jesus ministry, God was telling His chosen people that He was going to give them a new heart of soft, pliable flesh that one translation refers to as God-willed and not self-willed

A heart that is full of warmth and life and not hard and cold

And just as the state of our physical heart matters, so the state of our spiritual heart matters

When Peter and the other disciples were looking to replace Judas they prayed and trusted God to choose based on His knowledge of their hearts vs.24

It is important that our hearts are warm and soft and following the ways of Jesus Not just as individuals but as the body of Christ - His Church

And the new, spiritual heart of flesh that we have read about is evidenced in 4 ways

1. Unity

First verse of our Ezekiel reading said 'I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land.' vs.24

God's chosen people Israel had been scattered across Babylonia and beyond

God was promising them that He would gather them back together as a nation and lead them into their own land

Remembering that we are the BODY of Christ, not just individuals is so important

The new heart of flesh, the new covenant, was given to God's people not person

Our gospel reading is actually a prayer of Jesus for His disciples and he prays that they may be one as The Father and He are one vs.11 He prays specifically for unity between them We often sing the words 'By this shall all know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another'

In our reading from Acts Matthias, the newly elected apostle, was added to the 11 existing apostles. He wasn't elected and sent off on his own. He was added to the existing group Do pray for our PCC that as we have newly elected members - Gill and David - that we may be a united PCC who work together as one to serve you and serve God here in this place

(Get PCC to stand and pray for them....)

It is important that we work for unity amongst ourselves here at St Georges but also that we remember that the whole church is Christ's body and we should pray for and seek unity amongst us all whether in this country or abroad, whether from the Anglican church or another denomination As followers of Christ and believers in the New Covenant with a heart of flesh, Unity is so crucial to our well being and to the mission of God

2. Holiness

As well as placing a new heart within us, God also says that he will put His Spirit within us vs.27 His Spirit that will make us follow His statutes and observe His ordinances But the gift of His Spirit is linked with the New Heart

Remember the story that Penny told last week of the woman who had been married to a harsh and demanding husband. How she had obeyed him out of duty. But then when she later re-married she found herself doing the same tasks but instead of being duty bound was serving him out of love. You could say that instead of obeying her husband with a heart of stone she found herself serving with a heart of flesh, enabled by a change of spirit within her.

The Spirit of God within us leads to us living lives of greater holiness. He changes our attitudes and gives us a desire to walk more closely with God.

In the words of Ezekiel God is sprinkling us with clean water and cleansing us but His Spirit also changes our way of living and leads us to greater holiness.

In the prayer that John records Jesus as praying that He will be glorified in us, that our lives will display the goodness and love of Christ. He also prays that God would sanctify all His disciples in the truth. Sanctify means to make holy, to consecrate, to set apart

The new heart and spirit of the new covenant brings about our holiness as a witness to those who have not yet come to believe

3. Protection

The third consequence of this new heart is protection.

It is not explicit in the reading from Ezekiel but I think strongly implied

The last verse reads

'Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God' vs.28

Living in your own land brings with it a protection, a place of your own that you call home, a place that has belonged to your ancestors for generations

But also 'you shall be my people, and I will be your God'

If God is for us then who can stand against us

There are some beautiful words in the book of Esther that echo this...

Then Mordecai prayed to the Lord, calling to remembrance all the works of the Lord. He said, O Lord, Lord, you rule as King over all things, **for** the universe **is** in your power and there **is** no one **who** can oppose you when it **is** your will to save **Israel**, **for** you have made heaven and earth and every wonderful thing under heaven. You are Lord of all, and there **is** no one **who** can resist you, the Lord. Esther 4

God - the almighty, everlasting, all knowing, all powerful

If we are His people and He is our God then we have a security and protection that is beyond any other.

The reality may feel different at times

The people Ezekiel was writing for didn't go on to live straight forward, incident free lives

Nor do we. Following Christ is not an insurance policy against all ills as many of you will testify to

But He is our God and we are His people and He watches over us and guards and guides us and protects us.

And Jesus prays for our protection 'Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me...' vs.11

4. Joy

Finally I think this New Heart gives us a new joy

Those who have had major heart repair or a heart replaced, once recovered from the surgery and all that goes with that, experience a new joy. They can breath and move and live with a new sense of freedom and life.

The new heart that God promises to us produces Joy

Jesus prays that we may have His joy made complete in us vs.13

One of the fruits of the Spirit is Joy

When we enter into the new covenant and have our spiritual heart transplant, when we are truly united with one another in the body of Christ, when we learn to live with a new holiness and in the protection of Almighty God, we can experience a deep joy that is far beyond our human experience