

A Beautiful Heart!

Text: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, thy soul, thy mind and thy strength and thy neighbour as thyself.”

We often forget self love which is implied, in this most famous of all teachings.

Alan Cohen writes; “A Persian poet advised “If you find yourself with but two pieces of silver, buy a loaf of bread with one and some flowers for your soul with the other.” Being in the presence of beauty, keeping our spirits lifted and enjoying recreational time are just as important as getting the job done. All the accolades of the outside world are meaningless if your heart is empty.”

Deepak Chopra teaches: “Only the heart knows the correct answer...the heart is intuitive, it’s holistic, it’s contextual, and it’s relational. It does not have a win/ lose orientation. It taps into the cosmic computer- the field of pure potentiality, pure knowledge, and infinite organizing power- and takes everything into account... the heart has a computing ability that is far more accurate and far more precise than anything within the rational limits of thought.”

The great Christian faith teaches us that the heart is the center of integration of the human being. It is where we love, where we have intention, where we have imagination and motivation. If our hearts are not spiritually healthy, everything begins to fall apart. It is vital that we care for our hearts!

Sometimes the care of the heart comes into conflict with our job. We are forced by our job to make decisions that go against our hearts in order to stay employed. I knew one pastor who was asked by his personnel committee to fire an employee who was drinking

on the job. He had found out that this woman was drinking at lunch time. During the morning she delivered great work but during the afternoons the work deteriorated.

The pastor, suspecting her noontime drink took an opportunity to sniff the drink and discovered that sure enough it was strongly alcoholic. It was the pastor's duty to report to the personnel department who said immediately that she should be terminated.

By the time of the personnel meeting the employee was in the Intensive care unit of the hospital with alcohol poisoning. The head of personnel said that for the good of the church she must be told, in the intensive care unit, that she was terminated. That way the church could get on with hiring someone else.

The pastor could not do that thinking it most unwise to upset the employee further and perhaps send her over the edge. Personnel insisted. The pastor refused. Personnel reported to the next level up that the pastor had confused his role as head of staff and pastoral care, and that this was cause for discipline or termination because the pastor was insubordinate.

What would you have done? The pastor chose to follow his heart...

The same sort of drama played out a number of years ago, in front of Paul's Cathedral in England. The Occupy Wall Street Movement had spawned a group that met outside St Paul's Cathedral, taking up the space at the entrance of the cathedral with their tent city. The City of London had insisted that St Paul's evict the protestors for health and safety concerns. Dr Giles Fraser, Canon Chancellor, was in sympathy with the aims of the protestors and supportive. But pressure was put upon him by the city and he resigned. The protestors said he was an honorable man- his heart cost him his job. He couldn't in good heart evict them even although St Paul's lost about 20,000 pounds sterling every day that it was closed.

The Dean, Graeme Knowles, also resigned after pleading with the protestors to leave. Supportive of their aims, but also concerned about access for fire trucks and other safety concerns and also trying to do the will of the city and Cathedral chapter he too resigned after St Paul's was closed for the first time since the Second World War.

Both men, it seemed to me at the time, knew what it was to care for their hearts, **for the conscience is central to the heart.** Somehow, even at the top of their field in very influential positions, they felt compelled to listen to their hearts. I was thankful to God for their example and that they listened to their hearts and did not disobey them. But the price was very high. Both men loved their jobs and lost them.

Two little boys were talking about growing up and one said that he did not want to grow up because when you grow up your heart dies. As Jesus said "What will a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? ...Whoever cares for his own safety is lost, but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, that man is safe!"

On the internet there is a site for broken hearts. The stories there are heartrending. They are stories of lost love, broken promises, breaches of trust and romantic love totally out of control, so much so that they are suicidal when they lose the love of their hearts. As most of us know "Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." But we have all been young and inadequately equipped to handle life. Most of us have at some point loved and lost. But the good news is this. There are tools for us to care for our hearts. There are support groups, there are wise counselors, there are pastors and teachers and doctors and lawyers who are only too happy to help us, when they are asked and they know that we are serious. Believe it or not the world does not have to end when a love affair crashes. Time does heal wounds especially when the day comes that we decide not to be a victim.

It also really helps to join a group who have 'been there and done that.' There is something about a listening ear that heals us. We need to be ready to heal and have open hearts again. 'When the student is ready the teacher appears' - not before.

We need to be careful about who and what we give our hearts to. Some people, for various reasons, when we put our dreams into their basket, we discover that there is a hole in it and we fall through that hole. Our faith tells, us over and over again, that there is One to whom we can give our hearts for safe keeping.

I think that there is in all of us a spiritual space. Until that space is filled by The Great One, at our invitation, we cannot get a bottom in our basket and become worthy of carrying the dreams of others. Its primary. It goes back to the central core of Christianity and Judaism: "Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and your neighbour as yourself..."

In my experience, someone who does love God with all their heart, can be trusted with our love. And when it comes to being safe, there is no one like God to care for our hearts. As the old Christmas carol says; What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

The care of our hearts needs also to be able to respond to tragedy. Wise people often memorize Scripture and quotations that will help them in times of trouble.

Sometimes it really helps to have a beautiful passage memorized like the 23rd psalm. When you are sick in a hospital, or stuck beside the side of the road or perhaps in prison it is very comforting to be able to recite from memory "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. or the Lord's prayer.

When someone you love is dying the old words help like no other: "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me..." - How many time have I

quoted that verse when someone has been diagnosed with cancer and is trying to take that diagnosis in!

Bobby had lost all of his hair at the age of five with cancer treatments. He had experienced numerous painful procedures for his leukemia and today was another painful treatment.

As the procedure began Bobby said to his doctor “Would it be alright if I said the 23rd psalm while you stick me?”

“Of course, that would be fine” said his doctor and began the procedure. Bobby recited it beautifully, no tears, no movement and then the brave little boy said: “Dr. that didn’t hurt too much!” The doctor however, knew it had hurt plenty!

Then Bobby surprised him by asking whether he too could recite the twenty third psalm?

“Well, I don’t know,” said the Doctor. “I think so.” “ Well, let’s hear you!” said Bobby.

So, the doctor stumbled through it. All the other professionals drew back as they feared being called on next.

Then Bobby said, “You know you really should learn the twenty third psalm by heart. Because when you say it out loud, God hears you and lets you know inside your heart that he is being strong for you when you can’t be strong for yourself.”

Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings...

The passengers on the bus watched sympathetically as the attractive young woman with the white cane made her way carefully up the steps. She paid the driver and, using her hands to feel the location of the seats, walked down the aisle and found the seat he'd told her was empty.

It had been a year since Susan, thirty-four, became blind. Due to a medical misdiagnosis, she had been rendered sightless, and she was suddenly thrown into a world of darkness, anger, frustration and self-pity.

Once a fiercely independent woman, Susan now felt condemned by this terrible twist of fate to become a powerless, helpless burden on everyone around her. "How could this have happened to me?" she would plead, her heart knotted with anger.

Mark was an Air Force officer and he loved Susan with all of his heart. When she first lost her sight, he watched her sink into despair and was determined to help his wife gain the strength and confidence she needed to become independent again. Mark's military background had trained him well to deal with sensitive situations, and yet he knew this was the most difficult battle he would ever face. He decided to face it with the intelligence of his heart.

Finally, Susan felt ready to return to her job, but how would she get there? She used to take the bus, but was now too frightened to get around the city by herself. Mark volunteered to drive her to work each day, even though they worked at opposite ends of the city. At first, this comforted Susan and fulfilled Mark's need to protect his wife who was now so insecure about performing even the slightest task.

Soon, however Mark realized that this arrangement wasn't working - it was hectic, and costly. Susan is going to have to start taking the bus again by herself, he admitted. But just the thought of mentioning it to her made him cringe. She was still so fragile, so angry. How would she react?

Just as Mark predicted, Susan was horrified at the idea of taking the bus again. "I'm blind!" she responded bitterly. "How am I supposed to know where I'm going? I feel like you're abandoning me."

Mark's heart broke to hear these words. But his heart directed him to do what he knew had to be done. He promised Susan that each morning and evening he would ride the bus with her, for as long as it took, until she got the hang of it.

And that is exactly what happened. For two solid weeks, Mark, military uniform and all, accompanied Susan to and from work each day. He taught her how to rely on her other senses, specifically her hearing, to determine where she was and how to adapt to her new environment.

He made her laugh, even on those not-so-good days when she would trip exiting the bus, or drop something and be unable to find it. Each morning they made the journey together, and Mark would take a cab back to his office.

Although this routine was even more costly and exhausting than the previous one, Mark's heart told him that it would be only a matter of time before Susan would be able to ride the bus by herself.

Finally, Susan decided that she was ready to try the trip on her own.

Monday morning arrived, and before she left, she threw her arms around Mark. Her eyes filled with tears of gratitude for his loyalty, his patience, his love. She said good-bye, and for the first time, they went their separate ways.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday ... Each day on her own went perfectly, and Susan felt better each day as her confidence returned. She was doing it! She was going to work all by herself!

On Friday morning, Susan took the bus to work as usual. As she was about to exit the bus, the driver touched her shoulder and said, "Boy, I sure envy you."

Curious, she asked the driver, "Why do you say that you envy me?" The driver responded, "It must feel so good to be taken care of and protected like you are."

Susan had no idea what the driver was talking about, and asked again, "What do you mean?"

The driver answered, "You know, every morning for the past week, a fine-looking gentleman in a military uniform has been standing across the corner watching you when you get off the bus. He makes sure you cross the street safely and he watches you until you enter your office building. Then he blows you a kiss, gives you a little salute and walks away. You are one lucky lady."

Tears of gratitude poured down Susan's cheeks. She was lucky... for Mark had given her a gift even more powerful than sight, a gift she didn't need to see to believe - the gift of the love of his heart. As Robert Tizon has said:

"I would rather have eyes that cannot see; ears that cannot hear; lips that cannot speak, than a heart that cannot love.

Mark had a heart that chose to love, even under the toughest circumstances.

May God bless us all with such beautiful loving hearts!
Amen