

5 EASTER

MAY 20/21, 2017

1st MARSHALL

PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Acts 1:1-11; Luke 12:32-34

A Matter of the Heart

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.



The human heart has long been a dynamic symbol of that mystery we call life – and with very good reason. Not only is it an amazing and vital organ, but, as such, it's also surrounded by an aura of mystery. At a basic animal level, it is the instrument, the apparatus, the engine that pushes and pulls its liquefied life throughout the arteries, veins and vessels of the body. Take a moment to find your pulse and feel the rhythm of this machine that never sleeps, never gets a break, never takes a vacation... at least, it's not supposed to!!

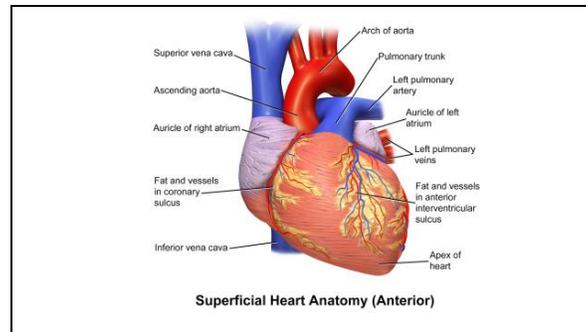
But our ancestors took it even further – imbuing it with special meaning, regarding it with a sense of awe, and writing about its unique powers with a sense of wonder. They drew no line of separation between the physical and spiritual areas of life.

In the fourth century B.C., the Greek philosopher Aristotle identified the heart as the most important organ of the body – the seat of intelligence, motion, and sensation.

-<https://web.stanford.edu/class/history13/earlysciencelab/body/heartpages/heart.html>

As such, the heart was also believed to be the innermost spring of life, the source of one's feelings, thoughts and energy. And, as the center of life, it was also regarded as the receptacle for inspiration from God.

- [A History of the Heart](#) by Ole Martin Høystad, p. 79



Now in our age of technical know-how, we pride ourselves on the fact that we've moved beyond such silly superstitions. We know exactly what the heart does and how it works... It's a pumping station, and every *lub-dub* within our chest is triggered by an electrical impulse in our brain. Nothing more, nothing less – the heart pumps blood.

And yet...as modern and scientific as we claim to be, the language we use tends to betray our charade, reveal our roots and close this supposed gap between the centuries. In a moment of great passion, a person might say, *I love you with all my heart!* Or...in times of great conviction, it's not uncommon to hear these words: *I believe in my heart that what I'm doing is right!*

We say such things, fully aware that:

- our hearts are not reservoirs of love, but receptacles for moving blood;
- our hearts are not centers of emotion but pumps always in motion;
- our hearts are not cradles of belief, but organs of relief bringing oxygen to every part of the body.

And yet, when a loved one dies, or a relationship is shattered, what better way is there to describe that deep, tearing pain than with the word: *brokenhearted??* Or, to describe an overwhelming sense of excitement than to say, *I thought my heart was going to leap out of my chest!*

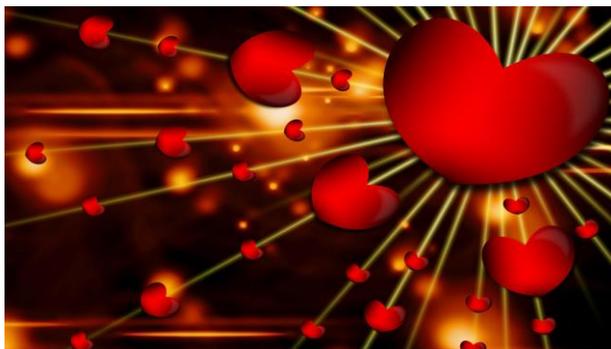
And then there's this beautiful quote by the author Elizabeth Stone who describes the tremendous – and terrifying – journey called parenthood. She wrote: *Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.* Maxed Out: American Moms on the Brink, by Katrina Alcorn

Isn't that funny? Surgeons the world over do heart-bypasses, valve replacements and transplants – some even build hearts out of plastic and steel. And yet, in spite of all that familiarity with the heart's actual function, still there is...something more, something mystical, something spiritual about that little base drum that beats in our chest.

In fact, it truly feels like our hearts **are** intimately involved with our emotions, our feelings, our beliefs. I swear that I **do** feel it in my heart when I'm moved by a sense of love for my family, pride in my country, or praise and devotion to God.

And remember what the two disciples said who had a conversation with the disguised Jesus on that first Easter evening. After recalling the way he opened their eyes to see how the Scriptures spoke of his death and resurrection, they said, *Did not our **hearts** burn within us while he was talking to us on the road???*

So it doesn't strike us as strange at all to read those words from the prophet Jeremiah who foretells of a time when the hearts of human beings will bear the writing of God's own loving hand.



Says the Lord, *I will put my law within them...I will write it on their hearts...I will be their God and they will be my people...*

Here is promised a direct connection between God's Word and the hearts of people. It's a tie-in, a string, a cord by which God promises to draw all people into the blessings of the good news of God's grace.

So, the crucial question for us is this: **How does God plan to put this promise in place? Exactly what law will God write on our hearts? And what kind of difference will such words make in our lives?**

Some would argue that what we **really** need is a renewed sense of obedience to the Law – and one look at the world around us suggests that a lack of discipline certainly contributes to our struggles. You’ve heard it said that a proper respect for the Law and a healthy sense of discipline will take care of many societal problems.

And yet – think of all the time, money and effort that has gone into creating, teaching and implementing programs to address just one issue: **bullying!!** To say nothing of enforcing **anti-bullying rules**... The first one I remember seeing was back in 2000-2001. And though it is a sad and important issue to wrestle with, **none of these efforts have taken care of the problem...**



Here it seems clear that the LAW to be written on our hearts **should** be like a cowhand who’s been hired to break the **rebellious attitude** of a wild horse.

With the bit firmly set in the animal’s mouth, reins grabbed tightly by the hand, the horse is mounted and off they go in a whirlwind of hooves, snorts, dust and sweat. Finally, when the rider has endured every buck in that bronc, the horse is tamed...submits to its master...obeys.

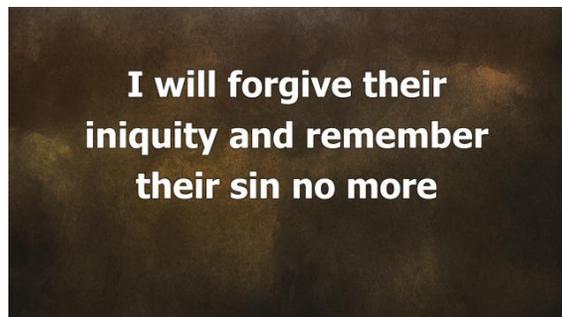
When our willful hearts, envious eyes, or stubborn spirits lead us into temptation, we need something to rein us in and put us back on the straight and narrow. But I think we’ve proven that the Law just isn’t able to do that. Says the Apostle Paul in Romans 7: ***I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do*** (vs. 18b-19).

Though our conscience is a gift from God, it’s not the magic bullet that will heal or help our wounded hearts that is promised in our passage from Jeremiah. A wise Indian man once said that ***Conscience is a three-cornered thing in my heart that stands still when I am good... but when I am bad, it turns around and the corners***

hurt a lot. But if I keep on doing wrong, the corners wear off and it does not hurt anymore.

-The Expositor and Current Anecdotes, Volume 13, by Rev. Louis Albert Banks, 1912, p. 301.

The power of our conscience is limited – it can remind us of what is right and wrong, but it cannot force us to do it – in the same way that it cannot create for us a new relationship with God.



But, thankfully, there is another part to the word of blessing from Jeremiah. Says the Lord, I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel....

This new thing that God has done for us is to write upon our hearts the law of **forgiveness** – of **God's** forgiveness – **and** – God's **forgetfulness** when it comes to our sin. This is **very** good news for **you**, and for **me**, and for **all** who have **ears** to **hear**: What is written on our hearts by the hand of God is God's law of **love** for **us** for **Jesus'** sake. God promises to truly forgive...and forget.

Ages ago, it was believed that a nerve controlled the feelings that we have in our hearts – it was called, appropriately enough, the heart-string. I found a reference to it in A Dictionary of the English Language...by Samuel Johnson, in the year 1768.



Now we know that no such string exists – but still, it provides us with a beautiful image of how the Gospel works on our lives. Jesus promised that as he was lifted up, so he would draw all people to himself.

Instead of the law of obedience with its bit and bridle and spurs and rope, our lives are pulled along by this heart-string, this gospel chord, this unbreakable chain of God's loving forgiveness for us in Jesus Christ. Amen.