

Ken Grahams Sermon

Heartbreak: City URC 29th March 2009-04-07

Create in me a clean heart O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Psalm 51.10

I will put my law within them and will write it upon their hearts. Jeremiah 31:31-34.

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself. John 12

Heart Disease affects every generation.

Dr Christian Barnard was a pioneer in the field of human heart transplantation.

The first operation took place in December 1967.

Since then huge advances have been made in cardiac surgery and treatment.

By-pass operations nowadays are common place.

From the moment of birth, rhythmic beats pump blood around the body, to give life, and sustain it until the moment we die.

An incredible life giving piece of machinery.

But what sort of life?

That is a question a group of awkward, uncomfortable, challenging individuals would be asking. They were part of a sixth century prophetic movement, six centuries, that is, before Jesus. And you will know some of their names – Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah among others. They play an important part in the emerging story of God’s relationship with humanity and that means you and me.

And the human heart was their business.

Not the heart that pumps blood but the heart that directs who we are.

In Hebrew thought, the heart again and again was considered to be of decisive importance in human activity.

It is about our inner being with an emphasis upon truth and justice, the claiming of the heart of man for the service of God

It is about life.

Life in the fullest sense of the word: life on earth, comprising joy, happiness and peace with God. The life that Jesus wants us to have in abundance.

And that, says Isaiah, is about learning to do good, seeking justice, correcting oppression, defending the fatherless, pleading for the widow.

But the context for the prophetic message concerns a breakdown in man’s relationship with God. Estrangement. The nation is sinful – they have given up on God – the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint says the prophet. Their religious festivals are a joke and their sacrifices meaningless.

They engage in acts of injustice, everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts – they do not defend the orphan.

The only answer is repentance.

Turn now from your evil ways and amend your ways and your doings. The message is not therefore without hope. Things can change only if there is a change of heart.

Jeremiah goes to the potter's house. The clay is spoilt and has been reworked so it is with God.

The psalmist says 'create in me a clean heart, oh God and renew a right spirit within me'.

So let us come right up to today!

Have things changed?

Is the world any different?

I think not.

The current global crisis and the circumstances creating it suggest a sickness in the heart.

[Sir Fred]

The planet is still in danger because of our ruthless exploitation of its resources for short term gain. And does not the threat of climate change put our future in danger?

The gap between the rich and poor continues to grow with the consequent suffering.

Refugees are greater in number than ever before.

Life in it's abundance escapes vast numbers.

And so it goes on.

Many years ago, a newspaper editorial headline proclaimed, The World's Heart in Need of a Transplant.

And only this week Rowan Williams, in a lecture, says we need a radical change of heart.

So where today do we hear the warning voice of the prophet?

Could it be that among the protestors gathering in London ahead of Thursday's G20 Summit there is a prophetic voice? I wonder!

Wednesday is being called by some protestors 'Financial Fools Day'

In our Lenten pilgrimage we turn to another All Fools Day, a Friday, when the sky turned black [Sydney Carter's Hymn] Forever Good Friday

We read today from John's gospel the prophetic voice of Jesus, offering both promise as hope: 'When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself'.

The lifting up is the lifting of the cross, towering over the wrecks of time, as the hymn suggests.

A man of sorrows is acquainted with grief. Words from the suffering song in the prophecy of Isaiah. This is where the human heart can be healed because in it we see into the very heart of God. [Critical letter arising from a broadcast service].

An event that Paul in 1 Corinthians calls God's foolishness in which God chose what is weak in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is low and despised to shame the wise.

That is the foolishness in which we put our trust. This is the gospel of hope where hearts can be broken and remade in the hands of God the potter.

I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts, says Jeremiah.

[Your shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.]

Postscript!

In a comment about a new biography of Charlie Chaplin, the critic writes:
Comedy can be more heart breaking than tragedy and Chaplin is the man of sorrows
whose sufferings have the power to heal a hard hearted, mirthless world.

Hymn 225 Here hands a man discarded

Questions for our time, points one who is subversive, offers a hand of promise to walk
into the night.