

FROM ONE MAN
Romans 5:12-21

3-5-2017
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Three boys are in the schoolyard bragging about their fathers. The first boy says, "My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a poem, they give him \$50."

The second boy says, *"That's nothing. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a song, they give him \$100."*

The third boy says, *"I got you both beat. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a sermon. And it takes eight people to collect all the money!"*

Inheritance. What did you get from your father? Your eyes. Your nose. Your hair. If you could see a picture of my dad, you'd clearly see that I got a lot.

Steve knew what he got. His father died at 35 from a bad heart and he had the same struggle. And now the time had come. He stared at the ceiling as his eyes slowly began to droop off to sleep. The bright glare of the spotlight, for a moment, pierced his drowsiness just long enough to make him question, yet one more time, the wisdom behind what was about to happen. And then he was out -- the anesthesia had taken affect, and the doctors began to go to work.

Steve's heart was so sick that it could no longer carry on the job of running Steve's middle-aged body. Medication had been tried. But that didn't work. Other types of surgery, ~ angioplasty, bypass, — had been attempted also. But they, too, failed the test. Steve was going to die soon— soon, that is, unless he could have a new heart.

The chances seemed slim. The possibility, unlikely. It had to be just the right type of heart. It had to come from someone who had been healthy. The person had to have been an organ donor. And there had to have been enough time for the heart to be removed and transported from the donor to Steve. So many variables. So many chances for failure. But there he was, now, on the operating table placing himself in the hands of surgeons ~ trusting hi them to give him new life.

The next thing Steve knew, he was listening to the voice of his wife. "Steve. Steve! Can you hear me?" "It had worked," he thought, "he had made it." He opened his eyes and already he could feel the dramatic difference, if only in his head. His hands seemed stronger. His breath felt deeper. He smiled.

From that moment on, Steve was a new man — a changed man! He could feel the difference both physically and mentally. He was able, again, to do things he hadn't done in years. He was able, again, to enjoy life without feeling weak and tired and run down. And even more than that, life itself seemed more precious. Before, he had gotten stuck in the daily grind routine ~ gone through the motions of life, but really on a treadmill, so to speak. But now he cherished every day and saw each new moment as a gift from God.

New life. Steve was given new life as his diseased heart was replaced with a new one. Changed. Dramatically changed from a doomed man to an uplifted man; from a dying man to a vibrant man.

While Steve is fictional, I've known, in my life, two people like Steve. My good friend Gary, from Connecticut, who has had so much done to his heart that it has essentially been recreated. You might remember that we prayed for him about two years ago over a period of about six months. And then there was a woman I knew from my church choir -- a friend of my mom. Her name was Carol, and she received not a heart, but a liver transplant.

Steve, Gary and Carol's stories are, in truth, really the same story that we find in our text for this morning. A story of new life. A story of dramatic change. A story of hope. The only difference is in the characters.

You see, the picture St Paul describes is no longer about some physical transplants that took place to someone else. It is about us — the people of God -- and it shows exactly what our Lord has done for us through the blood of His beloved Son.

According to our text, God's people -- you and I -- are like Steve. Our hearts are diseased by sin - plagued by the damaged heart that we inherited from our first parents. And we, like Steve, without any intervention, are headed toward our spiritual end. As hard as we might possibly try to keep God's laws, we can't muster up the obedience to do so. Because evil - an innate greed, selfishness, pride, lust -- is right there beside us -- always. They are there, at every turn, to lead us in a direction away from our Father's love and generosity. And nothing we can do would stop our weakened heart from diving deeper and deeper into the natural end of such disease. No medication can stem the tide of our impending demise. We are a people without hope ~ doomed and defeated.

But then GOOD NEWS. The hand of our surgeon has done something dramatic. The surgeon, our Gracious God, took hold of a heart that is perfect and powerful. A heart that could truly turn us around. A heart that could heal us and strengthen us and make us new, A heart that is a perfect match, for our weakened, diseased, doomed heart. The only problem is, that in order to be able to give us the heart he must take it from the one who owns it. And the One who bears that heart must be willing to give up his life so that we might be able to reclaim life. That person must be willing to sacrifice Himself so that we might be revived and renewed.

The BAD NEWS is that the Owner of the heart -- that donor - was His only Son whom He Loved deeply; who was united with Him as the Creator of all that exists and the Lord of the Universe. He would have to bear the pain, the agony, the suffering that we deserved. He would have to know the burden of our sin and the anguish of our destruction. He would have to be cut down, in the prime of His life, even though He was innocent and deserved none of it. Steve's donor gave up his heart because of an accident. But God's Son would have to give up His as a willing volunteer. Indeed, it would not be easy. That new heart carried a big price ~ both for the Son who offered it and for the Father who loved His Son.

The GOOD NEWS however, is that both were willing to pay that price for our rescue. And 2000 years ago, our Lord Jesus gave up His life so that we might have new life. He went to the cross so that you and I might have new hearts — changed hearts - re-created, by His Spirit, to act again like the one placed in the perfect body of our first father, Adam.

My friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, that new heart is ours, today! It is the new covenant that God establishes with us through His Son at Holy Baptism, where the Old Adam is daily cut away, discarded, and replaced by the new heart of the Son of God. And we lay hold of it freely through faith — a faith that God Himself works in us as the surgeon. He says it Himself: "I will make the new covenant with them. I will write my law in their hearts, I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sin no more." It is His work and His work alone that brings us this new life, this forgiveness, this salvation.

But what does all this mean for us? What is its importance for our lives? Well, my friends, whether we realize it or now, whether we appreciate it or not, we, like Steve, have a new lease on life. We are able, by the power of this new heart, to live life with a new energy and a new zeal.

No longer are we slaves to sin. No longer are we weak pawns in the hands of Satan. No. The heart of our Savior is much stronger than that; and it is able, by the power of the Spirit that fills it, to win the victory over sin and temptation. And our new heart never wears out. It never grows tired. It never gives way. But instead is always there for renewal and strength to live our lives of faith and service.

Unfortunately, all too often, God's people can find themselves evidencing symptoms of rejection of this new heart. That is, the challenges of temptation face us, and we give in, society's undertow pulls us into the ocean of unfaithfulness, even our own body burns with the desire to live according to the old patterns of greed, selfishness, dishonesty and pride.

And we lie.

And we turn our hearts toward the materialism of our age.

And we neglect the needs of others.

And we talk behind others back with words that injure.

We grow angry over foolish things.

We grow indifferent toward the pain of others.

You know the drill. Unlike our Lord Jesus in the Gospel Lesson, we are not always faithful to our new heart. The new heart that beats within us is rejected for the ways of the old. And circumstances can arise that leave us feeling empty and depleted -- yielding to depression and despair.

It's sad, really, when you think about it, because the power is right there for us. The new heart has all the energy and all the strength to carry us through any trial or temptation. It's like sitting in a dark room trying to read a book without the light only because we could not find the switch for the lamp. The power is there, but we fail to lay hold of it.

But even then, my friends, our Lord does not give up on us. He is still there to pick up the pieces, and offers his forgiveness and strength to help us move past our failure and carry on with our future. And when we seem to reject our heart, He is there to do CPR ~ Compassionate and Powerful Regeneration. We lay our sins and failures down at the foot of the cross and He breathes into our being the breath of His Holy Spirit to rejuvenate and sustain us.

My friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, How are you doing? Do you feel weak and tired and run down, spiritually? Do you feel like you easily give in to temptation and are easily crushed by the troubles and trials that the Devil and the world bring your way?

May each of us, like Steve, realize what we've become through the new heart God has given to us. And may we lay hold, every day, of the strength and forgiveness that is available to us through the cross. That's what grace is all about, my friends -- the power of the cross for sinners like us helping us to live, each new day, as His people.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right Spirit within me, cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation. And uphold me with your free Spirit." In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.