

Matters of the Heart

Kenneth Kovacs

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READINGS: [Matthew 6:19-24](#)

Fourth Sunday in Lent

One of the major themes running through the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' concern for the integrity of the human heart; it's a steady current that runs through the entire sermon. We saw this last week in our exploration of Jesus' call to wholeness, not perfection. Jesus summons us to be whole, even as God is whole. We also saw that Jesus, as a teacher of wisdom and physician of the soul, is a kind of cardiologist: he wants for us healthy hearts. More than an organ that pumps blood or the seat of emotions, the heart was understood as the totality of one's self, the source of thought, emotion, and will or action. Jesus understood the pain and destruction caused when hearts are divided, when we are at war with ourselves, or when our outer life is not aligned with our interior life. As we saw this morning in adult education, Jesus came to heal our divided, broken hearts, to lead us toward wholeness, toward a life that flourishes in the Kingdom, and that this healing, this desire for wholeness is directly related to how we understand salvation. "Flourishing are the pure in heart," Jesus said, "because they will see God" (Mt. 5:8).

These verses before us today put a spotlight on how we move from the inner to the outer expression of our walk with Christ. He wants us to pay attention to the divisions we carry within us and the way they get in the way of kingdom living. And often, our divided hearts come into focus when we reflect upon the things that we treasure, whether we are serving God or wealth. Instead of using a Greek word, Matthew uses an Aramaic word in the text, mammona or "mammon," which means property, possessions, or money. Mammon is difficult to translate into English. It refers to "physical money," as well as everything that money can buy, all the goods of the world, as well as everything that one owns. Implicit to "mammon" is all the privilege and power and security that then comes with having money. Mammon is extremely seductive and wields an enormous influence over our lives; even when we don't consider ourselves especially materialistic, it has a hold over us, we're in its grip, just by living in a society such as ours that worships mammon as a god. New Testament scholar, Jonathan T. Pennington reminds us, "One cannot flirt with money as if it has nothing to do with one's inner person."^[1] Did not Paul say, "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10)?

With this allusion to love we are brought back to the heart. We can't serve two masters. We might think we can. We might think we can hold our attitude toward money and wealth apart from our hearts and what God requires of us, but we can't. That's a lie. Jesus, who knows us better than we know ourselves, knows that we can't serve two masters, we can't live a full, whole, flourishing life with divided loyalties, for "we will either hate the one and

love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Mt. 6:24). We can’t be both servants of money, wealth, property, and possessions and servants of the Living God.

Jesus was enough of a realist to know that matters of commerce, trade, wealth, and the desire for financial security come with being human. What he’s concerned about is the way our anxiety around these things, our proclivities to hoard and save, worries about “having enough,” our greed, our obsession with wealth and money and things as if they were gods—and our obsession and fascination with those with lots of money and things, blitz and bling—are, together, unhealthy, neurotic, and sick. Chief Sitting Bull (c.1831-1890), the Lakota leader, said of the European settlers, said of most Americans, in 1887, “...the love of possession is a disease with them. These people have made many rules that the rich may break and the poor may not.” [2]. It’s a kind of disease that eats away our souls. In the end these “treasures” will be taken away by moth and rust, or thieves, or, in the end, death itself.

So, why not put your treasure in something of ultimate value and worth? For the sake of your heart, put your treasure in the things that make for life. Doesn’t that make more heart sense? Where you place your treasure says something about who you really are in the core of your being. What you treasure most tells the tale of who you really are.

This is a tough teaching to hear. Jesus is intentionally turning up the heat here, upping the ante. But Jesus offers this, not to make our lives more difficult, but because he loves us and knows what’s best for us. He knows what our hearts require. He wants to help your inner life to flow out, to shine out for the world to see. “Let your light shine before others,” Jesus said, “so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:16).

And to shine we need a good eye. Today, we know that light enters the eye and allows us to see. In Jesus’ time, the eye was understood as a kind of lamp or torch, and the light of the lamp flowed from deep in the core of one’s being. The source of light was within. The science might be all wrong in this text, but the spiritual and psychological truth is as true as it ever was. We see with the heart.

In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s (1900-1944) classic children’s story *The Little Prince*, the fox tells says to the little prince, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.” We see with the heart.

To have a good eye means there is light within. “A good eye is proof of inner light...Inner light makes eyes shine.” In the Judaism of Jesus’ time, if someone said, “You have a ‘bad eye,’” it meant that you’re selfish, covetous, that you carry an evil or envious disposition, that you “see” with hate. If someone says, “You have a ‘good eye,’” it meant that you were generous, you had an attitude of giving, that selflessness flowed from the light of the heart. [3] Jesus wants us to have healthy eyes, or, better translated, he wants us to have “whole” eyes. Whole eyes produce generous eyes, and generous eyes lead to generous lives.[4]

St. Augustine (354-430) knew the value of a whole heart. And he knew that faith is born in the heart. In his journey to becoming a Christian, as told in his *Confessions*, Augustine

came to a critical moment when he realized that his life didn't belong to him, he became conscious of just how anxious and confused and divided his intentions were, his heart was "restless;" focusing here and there, following one diversion then another. Then he came to see that the human heart can only find its true home when it finally rests in God. And so, he confessed, "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

It's difficult for a disordered, divided heart to wholeheartedly serve God. But when our hearts are ordered, whole, they can then be placed in service to something and someone larger than ourselves. Then the kingdom, God's love and justice, becomes our treasure, which we "invest" in with our hearts. We put our hearts into it, put our hearts behind it. We place our hearts in service to the kingdom, which is what Jesus did with his life, which is what Jesus calls us to do with ours. Like John Calvin (1509-1564), we can offer our hearts up to God, promptly and sincerely. *Core meum tibi offero, Domine, prompte et sincere.* (I offer you my heart, Lord, promptly and sincerely.) This was his personal motto. And he came up with an image, a symbol to go along with it: an upturned open palm holding a heart. He offered up his heart, a heart on fire, a heart alive to God.



Seal of John Calvin (coin)

Isn't this what we're called to be as a church?

Shortly, we will invite women and men, called by this congregation, to be ordained and installed as Elders, Deacons, and Trustees. The call to serve is a call to offer one's heart, promptly and sincerely, wholly and completely, to God and God's desire for this church. My prayer is that you will lead this congregation from your hearts—may you serve with all that you are, thought, feeling and will, the totality of your self, give it your all. May you put your hearts into this work and into this beloved people of God.

As we consider matters of the heart on this Lord's Day, it's fitting for us to dedicate our new website. A lot of heart went into the creation of this new site, our new online home on the internet: www.catonsvillepres.org. This website is a mirror that reflects back to us something of who we are, it reminds us who we are. And this website is also a window that allows our neighbors to look in and catch a glimpse of who we are, to see something of our hearts, to see where our treasure is, to see and even feel how we love one another and try to love this hurting, troubling, yet beautiful world. Something of our heart is there.

But, ultimately, the website is not about us, it's about the heart of God's love pulsating with life and passion and joy through us—and, to be honest, if we're not reflecting the heart of God as a church, then tell me, why are we here?

May our prayer be that whoever looks at us, whether online or offline, sees something in us of the heart of God. May it be so.

[1] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 244

[2] Mark Diederich, ed., *Sitting Bull: The Collected Speeches*, (Coyote Books, 1998), 75.

[3] Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 2016), 143.

[4] Pennington, 241.