

Season of Pentecost - Stewardship & Generosity (Week 3)

September 2, 2018

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Psalm 51:15-17; Luke 12: 13-21, 19: 1-16

Grace to you and peace from God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Change my heart, O God; make it ever true.

Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.

You are the potter; I am the clay.

Mold me and make me; this is what I pray.

ELW #801

An essay had been written by a man named David Saucier, a former patient at Methodist Hospital in Houston, the fourth patient at Methodist Hospital to receive a heart transplant. The essay was written on the 10th anniversary of David's heart transplant operation, and it's entitled "Number Four is Still Alive." As he reflects on his life after heart transplant surgery, David Saucier's writes:

Ten years ago in the wee hours of the morning, God performed a miracle in me. It was not the first miracle he had performed in my life, nor was it to be the last, but it was perhaps the most dramatic.

The transplant team at Methodist Hospital under the leadership of Dr. Michael DeBakey performed their fourth heart transplant, replacing my damaged, doomed heart with one from a young man whose own life had tragically ended.

Now, some may call this a miracle of modern science, but life itself is

a miracle of God, and for another person's heart to grow to my severed aorta and become a part of the living "me," is a miracle of God in my book!

David Saucier goes on to say:

Many people have asked me if I feel any different, or if I act any different, if the transplant has changed my life in any way. I can answer that in three ways:

First, he says:

There's urgency. I live with a renewed sense of urgency, and that has changed my priorities because I realize that if I'm to stop and smell the roses, I had best do it now.

Second, he says:

There is gratitude. I don't understand this miracle that has happened within me with my new heart. All I can do is accept and feel grateful for each additional day I live.

He goes on to say:

A third change is that I now walk a little closer to God because when you've been through a harrowing experience with someone you form a special bond with them. Recovering from the transplant was at times a harrowing experience, and I guarantee you I clung to God for

dear life during those times. He was the good friend who saw me through, sometimes the only one who thoroughly understood. I'm grateful that He was there for me.

Then David Saucier concludes his essay with these powerful words:

Deep down inside I know that God will always take care of me. I also know that no one lives forever and that someday He'll decide He can better care for me on the other side of the Jordan, but until that time, Number Four is still alive and enjoying every minute of it.ⁱ

While David was recovering, he began some curious conversations with his surgeon, Dr. DeBakey. Six months after his 1984 heart transplant, Saucier was back at work. With fellow NASA employees (who had also worked on Space shuttle turbo pumps), and Dr. DeBakey, Dr. George Noon and other Baylor staff, Saucier worked evenings and weekends on the design for a miniature heart pump. The result of the efforts is a remarkable battery-operated pump -- 2 inches long, 1 inch in diameter and weighing less than four ounces --small enough to fit even into a child's chest. In planted, this device can serve as a “bridge” for patients waiting for a transplant, or it can help a patient toward recovery by

helping rest a damaged heart.ⁱⁱ David's sense of urgency & gratitude went into action, helping others with desperate heart disease.

David Saucier literally had a change of heart. It brought a sense of urgency, gratitude and deeper anchor in God. What better way to describe what happens when we fully encounter our Lord? When the life and words of Jesus continue through our heads and our doctrines into the mysterious world of our hearts, we are transformed in small or large ways, so that we see, hear, react and respond differently. Being a follower of Jesus isn't passive or simply "being nice." Followers of Jesus want to be changed, they dare to let the almighty God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit — in, so that they can have a change of heart that creates an urgency, gratitude and deeper trust in God.

We see it happen in the life of Zacchaeus. The tax collector started out just being curious about Jesus, curious enough to shimmy up a tree to see him over the crowd. Then Jesus calls up the tree and invites himself to Zacchaeus's house for a meal. It was a scandalous move of Jesus' part, as the crowd was quick to

point out. Zacchaeus was a renowned and hated cheat, a man who worked for the oppressive Romans. Jesus doesn't let prejudice or criticism get in the way of reaching out to a lost soul.

We don't know what happened as they dined together. We only see the results. Zaccheus had a change of heart. He makes his resources available to God for the care of the poor. He no longer can justify a way of collecting taxes that cheats his neighbor so he can amass wealth. It's the kind of change that hanging around Jesus brings. And, with it, comes an urgency, gratitude and a great trust in God's goodness.

Someone asks Jesus to get in the middle of a family's inheritance battle. Instead, Jesus warns them and us about the dangers of self-centeredness and greed. He tells a parable of a man whose land is blessed with abundant crops. If he is grateful for the blessing, we do not know. We do know he considers it all his to do with it what he wishes. In fact, it becomes all about him. The already rich man consults with himself. He decides to store it up in new and bigger barns so

he can be sure that he can “relax, eat, drink, be merry” for many years to come.

Little did he know that he would soon die. Jesus does not call the man evil or bad but he does call him a “fool.” “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” Foolish are those who think they can be masters over their desires to amass possessions, money or power, for soon you find yourself captives of your goods and greed. When you put your trust in other gods, what you care about shrinks. It’s not that you aren’t welcome in the kingdom of God. You just don’t care about such things because it’s not about you. Gratitude, generosity and trust in God are for fools.

Several chapters later, in the town of Jericho, we see God makes it possible for one who had been lost to greed and himself to find new life in Christ. I think we sometime forget that being changed by God is that for which we hope and pray. We listen to God’s Word, receive God’s very presence in communion, pray for guidance, have a church community so God’s will can be done in each of us and the world. God’s will is to fill all creation with love, peace and unity on earth as it is in heaven. You and I need God to be at work in us so we get out of the way of God’s goodness, so we can become persons who God can use to bring healing and grace to this limping, world. And you know what? Each time our heart is reshaped or re-tuned, we’ll find our changed hearts discover an urgency,

gratitude, and trust in God beyond our limits. We'll know joy rather than anxiety, generosity rather than hoarding, freedom rather than enslavement. It's amazing what a child of God's changed heart can do.

Jesus has come to Hagerstown. He has come to Haven. "He has an agenda: to seek and to save and to change the world one person at a time. You might want to climb a tree and watch to see what he is up to. But beware! If you're paying attention, he'll stop beneath the tree where you sit...no matter how comfortable or complacent or secure or [foolish or] even immobile you may be. He will look at you and invite you down...down to fellowship with him, down to the opportunity be transformed. It takes courage to get out of that tree, but the gift of new vision and the reordering of priorities are more than worth it."ⁱⁱⁱ We are stewards, not owners of God's gifts. We find our greatest joy being as generous, gracious and loving as our Creator and Lord.

"Redeem our past, transform our present, and redirect our future. Call us out of the places we sit today and show us how to be the people you would have us be." *(Sing)*

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Linda M Alessandri 9/1/18

ENDNOTES

i. Reporting of this essay and story was found in James W. Moore's sermon, entitled "Grit, Grace and Gratitude," November 18, 2001 as posted on www.day1.org I did alter some wording.

ii. NASA News June 12, 2000 John Ira Petty Johnson Space Center 281/483-5111 **Release: J00-39 "NASA Engineer, Heart Patient, Had Major Role in Design of Heart Pump"**

iii. William G. Wilson, "Changed from a Taker to a Giver" October 31, 2004 as posted on www.day1.org