

Jesus Prays

(Easter VII, Post Ascension)

Today I want to talk about the heart, not the organ in the chest, the other heart, ie the passion, the feeling, the enthusiasm, the very crux of the person.

In common usage we hear e.g.

“Our hearts go out to drought affected farmers.”

“Didn’t have the heart to break the news...”

“With my heart in my mouth I...”

“From the bottom of my heart.” And dozens of others.

The Bible refers to this, the-real-person “heart” more than 800 times.

e.g. Blessed are the pure in HEART Mt 5:8

Where your treasure is there your HEART will be also Mt 6:21

Love the Lord your God with all your HEART Mt22.37

Paul addressing the Christians at Rome wrote, “The word is near you, on your lips and in your HEART” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your HEART that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Rom 10:8,9

Today’s gospel reading is a part of Jesus’ prayer just before he was betrayed and arrested. He knew what lay ahead and had told his disciples, though they didn’t understand. It sounds like a prayer from “the bottom of his heart”, very sincere, overflowing with passion, compassion, love; the very essence of his motivation and priorities.

Let’s consider our priorities if facing imminent death.

Perhaps visit friends, organise your affairs, farewell loved-ones.

Jesus prays.

He looks up and prays to the Father, His heavenly Father, father of Creation, owner and giver of all (v.6).

And the subject of His prayer? - you and me. vv2,6,11

The purpose of His prayer? - that we have joy in our hearts belonging not to the world, but to him, united in Him, sent by Him, truly dedicated to Him. Jn 17:13,16-19

O Lord God help us to receive and communicate this message to the world today - joy found in you, as united in our Jesus dedicating ourselves to you as we live in this world, sent by you for this great purpose – eternal life. i.e. knowing the Father, the only true God and the Son whom he has sent (v.3), having received the testimony of God that God has given us eternal life and that this life is in His Son. Jn 17:8, 1Jn 5:11-12

John announces so confidently, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 Jn 5:13.

So what do we glean about the heart of Jesus?

His great relationship is with the Father.

His great concern for those He came to save, all people, you and me.

His great hope that we would be united as a powerful witness to His own passion, compassion and desire for all to know his salvation and be eternally filled with His joy.

What a humble, caring heart has our King.

On Friday night our Premier Mike Baird attended the closing ceremony for a Kairos Short Course at the women's prison where my wife Julie is on team. His impromptu address to the graduating girls was so caring, so humble, so encouraging, affirming. To me it simply reflected a beautiful Christ-like heart. A beautiful heart enabled Gladys Staines to continue working among leprosy sufferers in India following the murder of her husband and two sons by a violent gang.

Saint Stephen's heart enabled him to appeal for his assassins, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them," as the stones pounded into his flesh. Acts 7:60

St Paul's transformed heart led him to refer to his multiple beatings, stoning, imprisonment, whipping, shipwreck etc as "light and momentary troubles achieving for us an eternal glory far outweighing them all." 2Cor4:17

It was after John Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed" that he had the assurance of sins forgiven and sought out further the company of the Moravians, holy witnesses to the full power of the faith.¹

Would we ask, "In what condition is my heart?"

Have our hearts been warmed by the lovely Spirit of Jesus? forgiven, assured, inspired, called, set apart for God's glory alone?

As we begin a week of prayer for Christian unity I want to share with those who were unable to be present at the Multi-faith Twilight Seminar Thursday evening, words of Pope Francis², quoted by Rev Dr Patrick McInerney, regarding our Triune Godhead.

Concerning God the Father –

I cannot truly call God "Father/Mother" unless I call all others brother and sister (cf 1 Jn 4:20).

Concerning Jesus the Son –

I cannot truly confess "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3) unless somehow that providential and loving lordship extends to and includes the religions and

¹ Journal of John Wesley: 24 May and 7 June 1738

² *Evangelii Gaudium*, the 2013 encyclical of Pope Francis

believers from other traditions.

Concerning the Holy Spirit –

I cannot truly claim to be following the Spirit unless I allow myself to be blown in places which I do not know (cf Jn 3:8)

With hearts more like our Lord's heart, we'll be keen for connection with people of all ages regardless of status, gender, ethnicity, creed or culture. Gal 3:26-28

We will want to proclaim what Jesus proclaimed – “the time is right, the Kingdom of God is near, turn from your sins and believe the Good news.” Mk 1:15

Like Wesley we will want to “do all we can, give all we can for as long as ever we can”, and, “continue to dream and pray about a revival of holiness in our day ... in which each person can be unleashed through the empowerment of the Spirit, to fulfill God's creational intentions.”³ And we anticipate once again, standing room only, in our places of worship!

Charles Wesley's hymn, “O for a heart to praise my God,” can be a prayer of dedication inviting God to give us hearts more like His, an invitation to -

A heart in every thought renewed
And full of love divine,
Perfect and right and pure and good,
Your life revealed in mine.

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
My great Redeemer's throne,
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
Where Jesus reigns alone.

A humble, lowly, contrite, heart,
Believing, true and clean,
Which neither life nor death can part
From Christ who dwells within.

Would you make this your prayer?

³ John Wesley, *How To Pray: The Best of John Wesley on Prayer*