

## Sermon for the Pentecost Sunday 2020.

Ezekiel 36:26-28. Acts 2:1-11. Psalm 68:18 passim. John 14:15-27.

**The Collect:** God, who at this time did teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit: grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour, who lives and reigns with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Ezekiel 36:26 ‘A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you an heart of flesh.’

Who wouldn't want a new heart?

Well... surely this can't apply to me!

My heart is perfectly...

perfectly what?

Perfectly disposed towards my neighbour as to myself?

Big and generous...

big enough to allow others to be themselves even if they upset me intensely and frequently?

Able to cope with the demands put upon it without failing?

Immune to shocks, so I don't have to miss a beat in a steady life?

Why would God want to give **me** a new heart, isn't the one I've got adequate to live a full life without further spiritual surgery?

Jesus said (John 14:27) ‘Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.’ Clearly, the disciples *were* troubled and afraid, though He had just told them He wouldn't leave them desolate; (I) will come to you (14:18). Actually, He says, ‘I will not leave you as orphans, I am coming to you.’

Now we start to see that the Western mind/heart tends to default towards its own centre of gravity. We think it is all about **my** heart, **my** ability, **my** personal situation. But, in Ezekiel 36, God is talking to them as a people, not as a person. In John 14, Jesus is talking to them as a group of disciples, not as an individual. In Acts 2, they had all come together (homou: as one); each one was filled individually together as a group

(pantes). In verse 7 and 8 the hearers remark: ‘Are not **all** these who are speaking Galileans?’ And how is that we hear, **each one of us** in his own native language?’ Which single individual would have been sufficient to have ‘contained’ the Holy Spirit in and of themselves?

There is an interplay between the individual heart and mind, and the group heart and mind under the influence of the Holy Spirit given and shared between the believers. So, it’s not **all** about how **my** heart feels, or what **I** have decided God is saying in any given circumstance. Rather, the gift of the Holy Spirit is to be shared and manifest by the common heart and mind of the group of believers. We all need to be in a shared relationship with God, and never imagine that we have a big enough heart or mind to carry the burden of life in our own strength. Our personal heart is not perfect, big, generous, or strong enough to branch out from the group. We need each other. We should, logically must, walk together in God’s ordinances, and learn to understand what our part is in the work of the people of God. A Spiritual Director can help us to consider these things more deeply than we can see from our own individualistic perspective. A Soul Friend, a trusted companion in the faith, can help make the pathway clear when we might be stumbling a bit. And the Church, with its catholic teaching can ensure that we do things in line with the mind of the Church together as an whole.

When He says ‘I will not leave you as orphans’, that is a better translation than ‘desolate’. We are a family, guided by a Father God, through His Holy Spirit. We are not crushed individuals who have to make sense of it all on our own. In Acts 2:1, the translation can tend to emphasise that Pentecost is a ‘day’, a festival, (‘When the day of Pentecost had come’), and that the people had turned up to celebrate it... bring a bottle, so to speak. But, better translated it actually says, ‘In the fulfilling/completing of Pentecost day, they were all together in one place.’ I believe that too much emphasis has been given in our Western, post-reformation mind-set to individuals being given the gift of the Holy Spirit **alone**. Yes, God deals some of His gift of grace to us as individuals, but He does this in the context of disciples as a group. It seems therefore that we need each other within the Church, and we only see the fullness of God’s purposes, and his directions for our joint lives, when we hold each other’s hearts in our own before God. **Together** we live Him. **Together** we keep His commandments.

**Together** our hearts will not be troubled. He leaves His peace with us; not as the world gives (Jn 14:27). **Individually**, our hearts can be open to God’s gift of the Holy Spirit. We are not orphans. Allelulia.