

Ezekiel 36:25–27

“Prepare Our Hearts”

16th Sunday af. Pentecost (Proper 20)

September 24, 2017

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen!

Ezekiel 36:25–27

²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[**Introduction**] This is our prayer – Prepare our hearts to offer thanks to you, O God!

Take your hand and place it on your heart.

No, we are not going to say the pledge of allegiance, but feel your heart beat.

God has given you your heart. In fact...

God provides everything you need to support this body and life.

God gives you your food, your clothes, your house and home, your health.

God even gives you your money and the ability to bring it in.

So how do you offer your thanks to God for all that he gives you?

Some people say that what they give to church is between them and God.

I agree; what you give is indeed between you and God.

I never look. I don't know.

You have your thoughts about what you give to church.

And God has his.

And because what you give is between you and God,
you need to know what God's thoughts are.

Some of God's thoughts about what you give as a thank offering are:

“On the first day of every week,

each of you is to put something aside and store it up,

as he may prosper” (1 Cor 16:2)

“For they gave according to their means” (2 Cor 8:3).

[Satan shackles our hearts]

God has many thoughts about your thank offering,
and God has designed them all to help you prepare your thank offering.

But Satan tries to shackle the hearts and thoughts of believers.

Satan shackles to keep us in one place—to make us think there's only one way.

Do you know how to teach an elephant to dance?

The first thing in teaching an elephant to dance is to train it to stand in one place. So the trainer, while the elephant is young, shackles one leg to a stake in the ground. Of course, the elephant stays shackled in that one place, never moving to another place.

Later on, trainers find they can keep adult elephants in one place by putting a small metal bracelet on a leg and attaching it to . . . nothing! The elephant doesn't move from that one place, as if it's still shackled securely.

That's a picture of how Satan makes people think they always need to stand in one place when it comes to preparing their thank offering.

It's as if a person's heart and thoughts are shackled to stay in one place.

It's as if a person's heart can never move to doing something another way.

It's as if their heart has been set in stone.

[Good Doctor]

Coming as a good doctor, God makes the correct diagnosis.

His people have heart trouble. They have hearts of stone.

Only a heart transplant will correct the problem.

God consults with his people about the transplant he'll do.

The surgery God will do is described in Ezekiel:

“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (v 26).

With new hearts, God's people would now be

free from Satan's shackles,

free to move around to make new decisions.

Ezekiel says that while God is doing the heart transplant, he also will give you an implant. ***“And I will put my Spirit within you.”***

Ezekiel was echoing the words of King David in Ps 51:10: ***“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”***

David was asking God to implant deep inside him a right, steadfast spirit.
He wanted God to put a spirit in him that would not waver from God’s Word.

Instead of the sin he had committed,
David wanted to follow God’s direction for his life.
In King David’s day, unclean things and unclean people
were made clean by the blood of sacrifices.

Our heart transplants would require a sacrifice too.
God’s heart so ached for us that he gave his own Son to be the sacrifice.
Jesus laid down his life by being lifted up on the cross,
the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of every evil heart.

Now Ezekiel promised God’s people that God will use water to make them clean and renew them. Ezekiel promised, ***“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses”*** (v 25).

Just as Ezekiel promised, God sprinkles clean water on you. ***“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”***

A “life-giving water”—baptismal water, giving you new life,
not a life shackled by Satan to stand in just one place.
And more: your Baptism is “the new birth in the Holy Spirit.”
Ezekiel, speaking God’s promise: ***“And I will put my Spirit within you.”***
David asking God, ***“Renew a right spirit within me.”***

[Steps]

God creates a clean heart in you and renews a right spirit within you.
Now God has prepared some steps you can follow as you offer your thanks to him.

First, he gives you clear, straight thinking, as Peter tells you: ***“Therefore, preparing your minds for action . . . set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you”*** (1 Pet 1:13).

God gives you a basic guideline in 1 Cor 16:2.
Paul writes, ***“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper.”***

First, think of your thank offering each week, each Lord's Day, each Sunday.

Second, put your offering "aside and store it up."

Prepare ahead of time—not on your way to church on Sunday morning.
—not when the plate is passed.

Finally, prepare your thank offering in proportion to how God has blessed you
—as the verse says: "as [you] may prosper."

God recognizes that each family, each person, prospers differently.
Some prosper more; some prosper less. But each does prosper.

[Baptism]

When you stood as an adult and heard "I baptize you,"
or when your sponsor held you and the pastor said, "I baptize you,"
right then God did a miracle on you.

God reached across the centuries and, in his own way,
took you out of the arms of your sponsor and
buried you right into Jesus' grave with him.

In your Baptism, you died to living sinful ways.
But that was only half of the story of the miracle that God did
when you were baptized.

[Conclusion]

God prepares your heart to thank him for all this he does for you.
Part of that preparation, we pray, will be through his Word over the next two
months.

Our sermon next month will give more guidelines.
And the sermon in two months will answer the question
"Why do I climb into the offering plate?"

If nothing else, O Lord,
prepare our hearts to offer our thanks to you. Thy Will Be Done. Amen.

"Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will,
through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21)
