

OUR REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH
9th S. after Pentecost
Eph. 3:14-21

“I Love Jesus”

Iowa City, Iowa
July 26, 2015

JJ

If someone came to earth from another planet and all they saw were tv commercials, what would they think mattered to those who live on this earth? Cars. Insuring cars. Communication devices. Various medications. We know there is more to life than these things, but it gets you thinking. Is life primarily about external things?

In the Old Testament, God was upset when people, especially leaders, trusted in chariots and horses rather than in Him or erected idols, like the golden calf, and worshiped them instead of Him. What would upset Him today? What matters to us today?

While this world, society, may focus on externals, what is going on on the inside, in a person's heart, is what really matters.

In the Gospel today we have a picture of what life is like. Jesus instructs the disciples to get into their boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida. He needed to spend time alone in prayer. Eventually He sees they are having great difficulty rowing because of the wind. He comes out to them walking on the water, and they think they see a ghost and are terrified. “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.” He then climbs into the boat with them and the wind dies down. They were amazed; they didn't understand about the loaves. Their hearts were hardened. What does this mean?

Jesus had just fed 5,000, miraculously providing bread and fish. The disciples were very impressed with the external miracle of the food, but their faith in Jesus did not reach into their hearts. They were excited about the bread and fish, but not so much about Jesus. Their hearts were hardened. They didn't let Jesus in.

That is so much like what life is like. We are sent out on our journey of life—the sea of life if you will—and we confront storms, tough going. We face illnesses. We must deal with business and financial challenges. There are marriage and family problems we confront. We have guilt over our sins. Whether we are aware of it or not, Jesus sees that our “rowing through life” is getting very hard. He comes to us. He does not abandon us but says, “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.” And then He walks with us. What is our response to Him? Is it all a matter of externals, seeing Jesus as the miracle worker; if He doesn't do the miraculous thing that we can see, we have no time for Him in our heart? Is that how it is? Are our hearts hardened?

It causes us to ask what kind of faith we have. Do we have a “bread faith”, a “show me the miracle” faith? Or is it a faith that is centered in a person, deep in our hearts?

The Epistle today is a prayer: that God would “grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...rooted and grounded in love...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Do we know the breadth, length, height and depth of Jesus' love? Do we know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge? Only if we know the depth of our sin for which He was willing to die do we know the depth of Jesus' love. Only if we have come face-to-face with the sinful reality of our lives

and realize Jesus was willing to go to the cross for such as you and me do we know the full dimension of Jesus' love.

What matters to us in our hearts? Our answer to that question may help us face the reality of our sin. The truth is that external "things", the 'horses and chariots' of our lives, our version of a 'golden calf' is what may fill our hearts. It is what fills our heart that is our god.

Yes, it is what is going on in our hearts that matters. That is true physically, as the following story illustrates.

Many of you remember Dr. Dale Meyer, former Lutheran Hour speaker, now Pres. of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He spoke here as part of our 50th Anniversary in 2007. He writes a short devotion called the Meyer Minute that is available on line. In one of his devotions he shared the following:

In 2011, Dr. Thomas Troeger of Yale Divinity School lectured on campus and shared the following true story. Dr. Troeger was a patient in the intensive care unit of the hospital. It was his first morning after major heart surgery and, as he slowly began to wake up, he heard banging. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. Regular and irritating—Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. He thought it must be construction workers driving piles for some new hospital addition. "Dear God, I'm in the hospital. Please stop that banging!"

The banging continued; it didn't stop. Dr. Troeger was just beginning to wake up. As he became more alert, he remembered that his surgeon had told him the new valve in his heart would make a regular pounding noise but also promised that it would quiet down in time. "Dear God, cancel that last prayer! Forget what I said!"

Then Dr. Troeger shared the moral of his story. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. Each sound is another heartbeat of life from God. Your heart beats about 100,000 times a day. Multiply that by the days and years of your life. Dr. Troeger remarked that he's never gotten a bill from God for any of his heartbeats.

Every heartbeat is a gift to you from your loving Creator. Every heartbeat is God's grace enabling you to give thanks to God and gratefully serve others. God is at work in our hearts.

"It is what is inside that matters" is certainly true physically. The message today is that it is true spiritually as well. It is God's desire that Christ "dwell in your hearts through faith." This is accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit "grants us to be strengthened" through Christ's presence in our daily lives.

As the disciples learned, we are able to 'cast out fear because Jesus is near.' We are able to cast out our fear of the consequences of our sin, for "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We are able to cast out our fear of the uncertainties of life for even going through the shadow of death means entrance through the gate of eternal life. We are able to cast out our fear of the future for Jesus has promised, "I am with you always."

The symbol for "I love Jesus" is a heart. That is where our love and faith are to be. The song says it well: "In the morning when I rise, In the morning when I rise, In the morning when I rise, Give me Jesus. You may have all the rest. Give me Jesus. Oh, when I come to die, Oh, when I come to die, Oh, when I come to die Give me Jesus. You may have all the rest, Give me Jesus." Amen. (LSB #976)