

Blessed are the pure in heart
Reinbeck UMC
March 16, 2008
Palm Sunday

Vince Lombardi used to say “Success demands singleness of purpose.” While he was talking about football, he could very well have been talking about today’s beatitude.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.”

We are very familiar with the heart. Everyone knows the icy feel of the stethoscope on their chest. The doctor listening intently to the whoosh, whoosh, of your heart. Many of you have seen cardiologists to have your heart function evaluated. We’ve seen EKG strips and monitors which show how the heart is beating. Some of us have seen Echocardiograms where we get to see the heart actually beating in live time, and watch the valves slap shut at the right time and see the red and blue representing the blood moving through the chambers. And that is all fascinating.

How many of you had children recently enough to hear the heartbeat of your baby before he or she was born? It is astonishing to me that there is a heart beat in a baby that small let alone that we can sit in the doctor’s office and listen to it.

As amazing as that is, that is not what Jesus is talking about. When he talks about purity of heart, he is not talking about a heart free from defect, or anything else about the blood pump that keeps us alive.

When Jesus says, blessed are the pure in heart, he is talking about something we can’t see. He is talking about something the Doctors can’t monitor or repair. In the Bible the heart is more than the blood pump. When the Bible refers to the heart it is referring to the thing that beats in your chest, but they believed that the heart was the seat of the will. That is different from thought, or emotions or intellect. The heart is the home of the moral center, the home of grief and joy, desires and habits, hopes and intentions. It is also the seat of the spiritual life.

So it makes sense that Jesus would talk about the heart.

So what does purity mean? You don’t have to understand Hebrew philosophy or the Greek language to know that purity means unspoiled or uncontaminated.

- A pure breed is an animal that one who’s genetics have not been mingled with any other breeds.

- Pure notes of music are notes that don't have any discordant sound.
- Pure water is H₂O and only H₂O.

A pure heart then, is one that is focused on one thing, not two; one that desires one thing, not two; one that seeks one thing and one thing only; one that hopes for one thing and one thing only.

A pure heart is one that is not divided between God's will and our will. One that is not split between knowing what is right and wanting what is wrong; one that is not torn between the things of heavenly importance and worldly importance.

- In marriage the impure heart is the one that loves the spouse but still seeks sexual satisfaction outside the marriage- or with internet porn.
- In athletics the impure heart is the one that spends hours training, and then goes out to abuse alcohol and drugs to unwind.
- In school the impure heart is the one that takes AP math and science class, but only because the love of your life will be sitting in the next seat.
- In politics the impure heart is the one that says all the right things to be elected, but panders to special interests when they get to office.
- On a diet the impure heart is the one that does weight watchers and exercise, but sneaks two big bowls of ice cream when no one is looking.
- In faith. . .
 - An impure heart is one that seeks God on Sunday morning, but is grounded in selfishness the other 166 hours of the week.
 - An impure heart is the one that shows up to church because it is the cool place to socialize, not to seek God.
 - An impure heart is the one that seeks to do God's will, until it is inconvenient, or until it seems awkward, or until our friends tempt us to do something we know in our hearts is wrong, but we do it anyway.
 - An impure heart is the one that does all of the right things on the outside, but for all the wrong reasons on the inside.

Today, on this Palm/passion Sunday we stand in the middle of a stark contrast. We start with the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and we will end with his

torture, and death. Our little minds reel with the difference between the beginning and the end of this story. Our hearts are on a roller coaster ride as we welcome the triumphant Christ in our procession represented by the cross proudly marched down the aisle, and the last thing you will see today is the same cross carried out like a casket, representing the lifeless body of the same Christ.

How do we get from here to there? How is it that we go from triumph to tragedy, from cries of celebration to cries of defeat; from halleluiah to horror? It all started back in the 9th chapter of Luke. When Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew this would lead to his torture and death, and he told the disciples as much. He knew that this would lead to terrible humiliation and pain, but that did not dissuade him. He knew that his disciples would all fall away, but that did not scare him. Nothing could cause Jesus to take his eyes off of his goal and purpose: following God no matter where it leads him; following his appointed path to the empty grave even if that path went right smack dab through the center of the cross.

That is purity of heart. Nothing could deter him. Not the disciples begging; not the devil's temptation; not the crowd's jeering; not the fear; not the pain . . . nothing. Even when given plenty of opportunity. At any moment he could have turned and gone to Bethlehem, or Nazareth. At any moment he could have used his already famous powers to calm the human storm that was brewing. At any moment he could have laid waste to the oppressive roman occupying army who would eventually kill him. At any moment he could have stopped and said, "April Fools, let's go turn water into wine boys." But he didn't. Jesus had one, single, pure vision and intention. That is purity of heart.

How about you? How is your heart today? I'm not talking about if it beats right, or if it has clogged arteries, or if it has a pace maker. I'm talking about your spiritual heart. How is your spiritual heart?

Is your heart beating for God and God alone? If your heart is not pure and it beats for God and your own ego, or God and power, or God and pleasure or God and satisfying others; you may have a fatal arrhythmia.

If on the other hand your heart is pure. Seeking God first, last and in-between. If your heart beats for God and God alone. If you have your priorities straight and your

priority is God. You will be blessed. Jesus says blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

I don't think we have to wait for heaven to see God.

- Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God everywhere they look.
- Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God in the sunrise, the blooming of a flower and the blowing of the wind.
- Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God in the chaos of a blizzard and the rumble of a thunderstorm.
- Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God the miracle of conception and the arrival of a new life.
- Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God in courageous suffering and the peace of death
- Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God working in the everyday events of their lives.
- Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God acting in the lives of friends and family
- Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the cross and the funeral procession that followed.

Do you see God? Set your heart on Him and Him only and you will see God today and everyday.