

YOUR HEART IS UNDER ATTACK!



Statistics reveal an increasing percentage of people who suffer from heart attacks, heart disease, and hardening of the heart arteries. The human heart (the organ) is under attack from increased stress, poor diet, lack of exercise and restoring sleep along with a myriad of other factors. It's a life and death issue! But the human heart (the controlling source of desires, intentions and actions) is under attack by the culture of death in which we live. Jesus calls it sin - a hardened heart. And according to Jesus, the hardened heart is not only prone to weakness and trouble, it's positively toxic. We live in a culture that seeks to control the human heart with public opinion, peer pressure and fear - and this has led to the toxicity of polarization on every topic under the sun. Differences of opinion used to be a matter of diversity but now they are a cause for division. YOUR heart is under attack and it's a matter of life and death.

Is there any hope for the hardened heart of the Pharisee, the disciple, for you and for me? The Gospel of Christ proclaims a life-saving YES! In Psalm 51, David confesses his sin of adultery: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10). The Creator of the world, who created mankind as man and woman, is also the One who creates in mankind a new heart through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. There is a great need for the toxic world in which we live to hear the life-saving Gospel truth that God's plan and will is something completely other than the spiraling moral decay of today's culture of death. The Gospel of Jesus proclaims the absolute certainty that the old, hardened, toxic heart can be made new again through His saving grace. **Read this article** as an urgent life and death matter because YOUR heart is under attack and the only hope is the Gospel!

The heart wants what the heart wants.

Once a young man proposed to his girl as they sat looking over the beautiful lake. "Darling, I want you to know that I love you more than anything else in the world. I want you to marry me. I'm not wealthy. I don't have a yacht or a Rolls-Royce like Johnny Green, but I do love you with all my heart." She thought for a minute and then replied, "I love you with all my heart, too, but tell me more about Johnny Green."

Jesus clearly presents God's will for all people in Matthew 6:21, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* We were created with a heart for the unity found in God and with one another. But sin has changed, hardened the heart toward God and toward each other. As Jesus goes on to say in the Sermon on the Mount, our eyes see and our heart wants. The hardened heart is selfish. Jesus explains what defiles every human heart in Matthew 15: *"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the*

heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:18-19). The Preacher in Ecclesiastes 9:3ff echoes the truth of Christ: “The hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”

God’s truth is being acted out in our culture of death. Your heart is under attack. Just last week, the Democrats passed a partisan bill, the Women’s Health Protection Act, in the House of Representatives. Every Republican voted against it. All but one Democrat voted for it. This bill allows for abortion all the way up to the time of birth. It allows for abortion for gender selection. This position is more radical in its scope than most positions around the world. Pro-choice is advocating that what the heart wants it should get. It falsely declares, “It’s my body and I can do as I please.” It attacks the Genesis 1 and 2 foundational truth that the Triune God is the Creator and Giver of life and mankind is a steward of this gift.

A new commercial for “Untie the Knot” is advocating on-line, uncontested divorce as easy and convenient. With the click of a mouse a couple can separate what God has joined together as one. The culture of death attacks the human heart to make life, people, and relationships disposable. The problem of divorce reflects a far deeper problem. Moses permitted divorce under certain circumstances not because it was the right thing to do but only as a concession to human sin and the hardened heart. On the contrary, its very existence stands as an indictment of the human condition. Divorce reflects the pervasive reality of sin.

The disposable nature of relationships and people was acted out for us in the media with the tragic death of Gabby Petito. Gabby’s death was indeed tragic but so was an unmarried couple taking a cross-country trip together. The heart wants what the heart wants - but parents, grandparents, friends - someone should have lifted up the truth that this activity is against God’s will. But living together has become so common place that it’s tolerated by God-fearing Christians. They throw up their hands in disgust and surrender - “What are you going to do? The heart wants what the heart wants.”

Hard hearts want to be right - or else.

The hardened heart always wants to be right and point out the wrong in others. A certain married couple had many sharp disagreements. They ended most fights thinking that they were right and the other was wrong. Yet somehow the wife always stayed calm and collected. One day her husband commented on his wife’s restraint. “When I get mad at you”, he said, “you never fight back. How do you control your anger?” The wife said, “I work it off by cleaning the toilet.” The husband said, “How does that help?” She said, “I use your toothbrush!”

The hard heart is a condition that exists even before we do anything wrong, even before we commit sin. A diseased tree (original sin) produces bad fruit. In order to get good fruit, the condition of the tree needs to be changed. Sinful people commit sins. Hurt people hurt people.

The hard heart is the heart that always wants to be right. The hard heart insists "I'm right and you're wrong." The hard heart knows it all. The hard heart is unwilling and unable to concede any weakness or failure on its part. The hard heart wants to know, "Is it lawful?" because the hard heart always wants to be right. The hard heart always wants to win, to succeed, to be on top.

The hard heart is the enemy of all relationships - including the one we have with God. The hard heart is unwilling to be soft. In other words, the hard heart has got to be in charge. It is afraid of being soft, of becoming vulnerable and dependent, of conceding that it needs to trust anyone other than itself. The hardness of heart that leads to distrust, conflict, and selfishness within a marriage is also the hardness of heart that leads to the distrust of God. That is the ultimate indictment of what Jesus has to say in Mark 10:2-16. Sin is not just our mistreatment of others. Sin is our mistreatment of God. God wants us to have faith in Him, trust Him, to count on Him, to hope on Him more than anything else in this world. Ever since the Garden of Eden, the descendants of Adam and Eve (that's all people like you and me) have refused to do that. We have hard hearts. We want to do things our way.

The hard heart goes so far as to say, "I'm right. God is wrong." That's why we see such polarization on almost any imaginable topic: pro-life vs. pro-choice; vaccinate vs. not vaccinate; masks vs. no masks in school; gender vs. gender identification; immigration laws - in every case somebody has to be right and the other is wrong. Tragically, seldom is it ever considered over against God's sole authority and God's perfect will for all His creation. We should desire what God wants. Instead, we dismiss His sovereignty. This has led to saying that the person who has a different opinion isn't just wrong but my sworn enemy. Lives are snuffed out, racism and injustice are rampant, destruction of property is justified and as the Preacher in Ecclesiastes said, "*Madness is in their hearts while they live.*" It is so bad that we can't decide whether it's a taco or a sandwich without drawing lines of separation.

Our God is the Author of Life. Satan is all about death and the culture of death in which we live. Jesus came to change all that. The writer of Hebrews proclaims this fundamental truth: "*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus] partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who **has the power of death, that is, the devil**, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery....Therefore He had to be like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted*" (Hebrews 2:14-15, 17-18).

Yes, there is help for hardened hearts and broken lives. Jesus is our ever-present help.

The culture of death that is attacking your heart sees every person and relationship as disposable; God sees every life and relationship as His treasure. It's amazing what our

hardened hearts will do when we take the bait of unforgiveness. Someone has said that unforgiveness is like taking poison and waiting for the other guy to die. We live in a litigious society in which we like to hold others responsible for things. “Who is to blame?” we want to know. “Someone has to pay,” or so we have been taught. In a world of debt, nobody gets away with anything. When we say, “We can’t forgive,” we really mean, “We won’t forgive.” We’ve taken the bait of the culture of death. Our hearts are under attack. We have made the clear choice to seek revenge, to hold the grudge, to get even or keep the wound open and unhealed.

But God holds the cross before our eyes. As Jesus hangs from that cross, the way of the world would expect Jesus to cry out with words like, “Who is responsible for this? The Romans? The Jews? The Pharisees? The disciples who betrayed and denied Me? The people who stood by and did nothing?” Could He not have cried out looking at each and every one of us saying, “It’s your fault – your sin put Me here!” Instead, we hear Jesus say, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:24). He forgives you. He forgives me.

The story is told of a girl in elementary school who had to do a project for science class. She decided to build a model of the world. So she took a rubber ball for her globe and carefully cut construction paper in the shape of all the continents and glued them on the ball so they would be round like the world. When she finished, she set her project on the table and went out to play. About this time, her little sister came in and began to play with the globe. She took Africa and tore it off. She began to chew on China; and she took a crayon and colored all over Europe. Just then her older sister came back in. When she saw what happened, she began to scream, “Sally, look what you’ve done. You’ve ruined everything. I hate you.” Sally ran away in tears. When the older sister realized what she had just said, she ran and found her sister, threw her arms around her, and hugged her. She then said these words: “**You’ve messed up my world, but I still love you. I forgive you.**” The Gospel changed this entire encounter and it softened hearts hardened by sin. Those words are at the heart of God’s plan of salvation and God’s will for us to be joined together with Him and with one another in Christ.

Jesus’ words for us in Mark 10 are both a command and a judgement against hardened hearts. They are a command, demanding that we take responsibility for the quality of **every relationship** in which we find ourselves; that we take the log out of our own eye before pointing to the splinter in the eye of another; that we change our own behavior patterns to give more than we get; to listen more than we talk; to relate to persons equal under God; refusing to look down upon or up at anyone. They are words of judgement against hardened hearts because they condemn all separation as sin. Sin separates! Anything that makes our relationships not right, everything in them that is wrong, is sin. But that’s not the end of the story. The Law doesn’t save. It can’t save. Our Great High Priest came down from heaven to earth, to experience all that we experience, **without sin**, to save us through His blood.

The saving Gospel does its work to soften hearts, heal the broken and equip the redeemed with His Word of life. The Holy Spirit convicts hardened hearts with the Law to soften them for the sweet Word of the Gospel that forgives, redeems, saves and enlightens. All of us are in need of God's dramatic change because we are all sinners. Even if our marriages are still intact, even if we've never had an abortion, even if we follow the laws of our state and nation, we still fall short of God's perfect will. We are in need. It's a matter of life and death. The Holy Spirit moves us to confess our brokenness and need. We acknowledge that our hearts are hard, broken, wounded, bleeding. We can let ourselves be vulnerable. We can say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me." For it's for just such hearts that Jesus has come. He declares us His children to sit on His lap where He blesses us with His grace and loves us in His embrace.

Here's the Gospel: our heavenly Bridegroom, our God and Savior who comes to us with rescue, love and forgiveness, in the midst of our messy world, exactly when we are most lost, most steeped in sin, and most unlovable. Our Savior, who in His incarnation became ***one flesh*** with us, so that through His life, death and resurrection He might make us one with Him forever. And so, on the Cross, He spoke His marriage vow to us, His sacred "I do and I will" as He laid down His life for His bride, the Church. He outstretched His arms to say, "You've messed up My world, but I still love you." We brides who come as hard as rock but leave as soft as silk; we come to Him black as sin but leave as white as snow. In Him, we see marriage and all relationships as our Lord intended them - as gift, not law; as blessing, not obligation; as one flesh, which no one can separate.

As Christians, the Bride of Christ, speaking the Gospel is a matter of life and death.

Yes, hurt people hurt people. Hardened hearts act out in sinful ways. But there is a greater truth: healed and redeemed people who were broken speak the Gospel to a broken and hardened world. Salvation won't happen by our judgement of the world - the Pharisees did that; salvation won't come by shunning the weak and vulnerable - Jesus' own disciples did that. Salvation comes from the Word of Gospel accompanied by the Holy Spirit that makes children of God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Do you consider this culture of death and our broken world a lost cause? Jesus doesn't. Instead, He considers it an urgent matter of life and death for every person we encounter. He is the Bridegroom who loves His bride - that's who He gave His life for - and as dearly loved children, we are living proof that hardened hearts are changed, that the dead can be made alive, that enemies can be made friends in Christ. Be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have - and the hope that you now live in for eternity: Jesus Himself.

Have you ever seen Waterford Crystal? It's beautiful but extremely fragile (like relationships). When you drop it, it shatters into a thousand pieces and no matter how hard you try to glue the broken pieces back together, it never looks as beautiful as before it was dropped. Sometimes we get the idea that as human beings we are like leaded crystal. We are lovely until we make

a mistake (and no one is exempt - we are all sinful by nature and sinful in thought, word and deed). Then life shatters into a thousand pieces and can never be put back together just right - never put back the way God meant it to be. Therefore, there is no hope.

It would be better to compare life and all relationships to Silly Putty rather than to leaded crystal. Like Silly Putty, we can be pulled apart, rolled into little balls, flung against the wall, or smashed flat. But by the grace of God, like Silly Putty, we can always be scraped back together again, forgiven, reworked, remolded, and reshaped into someone that is even more beautiful than before. There is always hope in Christ. The Gospel of God alone does that.

Therefore, you are encouraged by God's Word to share the Gospel to His world that He loves and longs to embrace and call His children. But I don't have to tell you that we struggle in this regard. We are often silent observers of the world in need. Abortion, divorce, racism, violence, domestic violence, contractual unfaithfulness, estrangement, and disharmony are seen as "common day" occurrences. But Jesus has a Word: **"You've messed up My world, but I still love you. I forgive you. Your heart is changed. You are a new creation."** See the world around you as Silly Putty rather than Waterford Crystal. Share God's hope in Christ.

Your Evangelization Team is seeking to equip you to see the world in this way. Our District and Synod have resources like *"Every One His Witness"* along with Rev. Dr. Wood's new book, *"Connected to Christ - Witnessing in Everyday Life"* – just to name a few. Ask your pastor to lead a class using these resources for your church family or go to the Synod's "Making Disciples for Life" website for ideas. But most importantly, pray for the heart to see the world around you as hardened by sin and broken by nature. Ask the Holy Spirit to use you to say to your neighbor, co-worker, estranged family member, "You've messed up my world, but I still love you. In Christ, I forgive you. You are my family in His name." Our prayer as a Team is that God will soften our hearts, heal our brokenness and empower each of us to speak the Gospel (For God so loved...John 3:16) as a broken but redeemed and healed person speaking to someone in dire need. The world needs the Gospel, and you have it. Yes, it's a matter of life and death.

Share with us your prayers, thoughts, concerns and joys of witnessing of Christ at this email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We look forward to hearing from you. Your heart is under attack. But the Gospel heals. For where your treasure is, there your heart is also - a heart for the world that Christ desires to be His children. With the Gospel you share, God is, in Christ, hugging the world to Himself, hugging you and me through those arms in love that will never let go, because we're His children, brothers and sisters of the Lord and of one another.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20