

Let us pray...

Loving God, be with us this Easter Morn as we explore, "Blessed are the pure in heart." We give thanks for all the Beatitudes, even though living the way of the Beatitudes is never easy. Give us the courage this morning to assess the state of our heart. Draw us ever closer to you, for we want to see you. We want to see you at work in our lives and in this world. We pray in the name of the Risen One, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Anyone remember being grilled by their parents about their day at school? Or what about parents who remember asking their children about their day at school? The answers you probably received were normally short and sweet... "Nothing much," "Just the normal stuff," or maybe all you got was a shrug or a grunt or "I don't know."

A young dad was frustrated because his daughter rarely responded to his question, "What did you do today at preschool?" He knew Julia to be a curious 3-year-old, for she always wanted to know more. Yet, she just didn't have any interest in responding to his daily question. But, things changed when the young dad changed his question. Instead of asking her what she did, he asked her what did you notice. What impressed your senses today, Julia? What did you see, or hear, or smell, or taste, or touch, that made an impression on you today?

The young dad recalls some of the things his daughter noticed. "One day she told me about looking up from the playground and seeing a flock of white birds fly overhead, sharp against the bright blue sky. Another day she noticed the sting on her face when a rambunctious playmate tossed sand in her face. Upon returning from a visit from her grandmother in Monterey, she told me of seeing a slick-skinned, shiny sea otter wiggle around on its back, as it cracked open a sea urchin by banging it against a rock, and swallowing it down. She demonstrated all these actions of course! Another day she noticed the sweet notes of bird song floating down our chimney; is there a nest up there she wondered?"

Julia wasn't focused on what she did, but rather on what caught the eyes of her heart on any given day. Julia's heart was singularly open to the world all around her. The eyes of her heart were unencumbered by the strains of adulthood. She saw what so many of us have stopped seeing - the wonder, the beauty, and the surprise of the world around us, which God created.

My twin sons, when they were about this same age reminded me that I had forgotten the wonder, the beauty and surprise of the world around me, too. I was focused on piling them into our car and getting all of us to where we needed to be going. They on the other hand were open to being surprised by the day. We had a

tree in our front yard that had beautiful tiny white blossoms each February. This particularly blustery morning they saw something I didn't, for they exclaimed with exuberance, "Mom, it's snowing!" Their excitement stopped me in my tracks and indeed, the tiny white blossoms being blown about and pulled earthward by gravity made it look like it was snowing. I would have totally missed the beauty of that moment, if their little hearts weren't singularly focused to see the wonder and beauty of the world around them.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." This may very well describe these three year olds, but most of us are well past that age. Most of us are well past the innocence, the pure heart of childhood. I doubt that others would describe any of us using this descriptor either - oh Cheryl you have such a pure heart! No, "Pure in heart" probably sounds to our grown-up ears impractical or maybe impossible, if the truth be told, because we all know that we are far from pure. We know ourselves to be less than pure, less than perfect in our thoughts, and less than blameless in our actions. Even when we don't act on our jealousy or anger, our greed or desire to get even, we know thoughts like these can linger within us.

So just like the other seven Beatitudes, we may decide to give up before we even try to understand what Jesus was teaching. We may just decide that the promise of this Beatitude, "for they will see God," just isn't possible for us, because we aren't, or never will be, "pure in heart." As a five-year old named Chris once said to my sons, "God lives up there!" How can we possibly see God, if God is way up there in heaven, aloof, apart, and separate?

The good news is that the Greek word translated "pure" in this beatitude does not equate to being perfect or innocent or morally blameless! Pure equates to "clear," as in understanding with clarity or filled with one quality rather than a mixture of qualities. The psalmist who wrote, "O Lord... give me an undivided heart to revere your name," [Ps 86:11] was asking God for what I believe Jesus was getting at with this Beatitude. The psalmist asked for a heart set on honoring God, or what the Bible calls elsewhere a "singleness of heart" [Eph. 6:5]. So, a pure heart is an undivided heart, a heart singularly focused on the ways of God.

But, what about this word "heart?" What does the word "heart" mean in scripture? Well, the word appears 592 times in scripture and it represents the life-giving core of human life, the essence of who we are as humans. The heart, according to scripture, is the motivating, controlling center of our human personality, the deep inner source of passion, energy, and direction for our lives. Our heart is of the utmost importance because from the heart flows our character. Listen to that once again... from the heart flows our character.

According to scripture the heart is the center of our emotions - we may be cold-hearted or warm, passionate or indifferent. With unwavering clarity, the scriptures take us to the deepest places of the heart, convinced that, "The heart of the matter is always a matter of the heart," says Jim Harnish. The challenge of this Beatitude is this: What's the state of your heart this Easter Sunday? [Pause]

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God made it abundantly clear that the heart of God's people was in need of repair! And not just a new valve or a bypass, but an actual heart transplant. The heart of the matter for God's people was that their hearts were cold stone dead! Their hearts had focused on detestable things and abominations. They had forgotten that they were blessed by God to be a blessing to others.

In today's terms, we might say they were very good at doing church, but they had forgotten what it means to be the church. Or we might say they knew all about God, but didn't put that knowledge into practice day in and day out. They were only focused on the perks God promised, but had completely forgotten about their obligations to love their neighbors as themselves. The Israelites had turned away from the ways of God and focused on the ways of the world immersed only in satisfying their own needs while forgetting about others.

Now I can't imagine that any of us gathered here today to celebrate Easter are anything like these Israelites! [Pause]

Or maybe... just maybe we are more like them than we care to admit. Maybe our hearts are not cold stone dead, but then again, they may not be undivided and singularly focused on the ways of God.

"I will remove their heart of stone from their flesh," said God through the prophet Ezekiel. This wasn't a simple procedure; it was major surgery! And surgery of this proportion is painful. It's painful because it called the Israelites to account. They had to admit their waywardness. They had to let go of the nonessential things filling their lives. They had to confess that their hearts had really become hearts of stone, oblivious to God's claim and call on their lives.

What about us? What's the state of our hearts on this Easter morn? Are they like stone or hardened or slightly malleable or pulsating with undivided commitment to the ways of God? [Pause]

Even on Easter Sunday, even after a Lenten season steeped in these Beatitudes, I understand why it is easier "not to see God" or "not to notice God at work in the everyday places of our lives," for as Annie Dillard reminds us, God has a tendency to draw us out to where we can never return! God takes our hearts of stone and replaces them with hearts of flesh, giving us hearts that discern all that is not as God desires in our world. With transplanted hearts, we won't be satisfied

with the status quo or with injustice or settle for indifference because we will know what God envisions - heaven on earth. God's new spirit within us will continually challenge us to love our neighbors more deeply, even if our comfort is disrupted and it seems, as if we are no longer in control.

The truth of the resurrection that we celebrate today isn't just a story from 2,000 years ago that we simply dust off and retell once a year. It's a story that continually replaces hearts of stone with hearts of flesh 365 days a year.

Resurrection truth though, is not possible without death. Christ could not rise, if he had not been crucified. [Pause]

So let me ask again, "What's the state of your heart?" What needs to die - an old paradigm, a debilitating habit, an indifference to others and their suffering? What needs to die within you so that you might more fully live the way of God? [Pause]

You're blessed says Jesus when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right—that is, when we have a heart of flesh vibrantly beating as one with God, for then you will see God, for then you will see what God sees and realize without a doubt that there is much work to be done!

These Beatitudes, so beautifully expressed in the art of Carol Appleton, challenge us to ask ourselves, "What's the state of our heart?" Are our hearts stone cold or vibrantly alive? Are our hearts doubt and fear filled or undivided and ready to claim the power of the resurrection for our lives and for this world?

A fact about our faith that never ceases to amaze me is that God chooses to work through ordinary, everyday people like you and me. God chooses us! We are God's hands and feet, eyes and arms, which bring a bit of heaven on earth each and every day as we dare to live into the truth of the resurrection.

Through this Beatitude the risen Christ reminds us today, "Blessed are those whose hearts are undivided and singularly focused on the way of God, for they will see God!

Christ lives! The question is will we? Will we live with undivided hearts, as vibrantly alive as Christ? Will we?

I pray so. I pray so. Amen.