

Sunday, November 28, 2021 Advent 1 “Developing a Pure Heart”

Jeremiah 33:14-16 Luke 21: 25-36 Matthew 5:1-12

This is the first Sunday of Advent and the first of our sermon series focusing on “The Grinch who stole Christmas”, a favourite Christmas story written many years ago by Dr. Seuss. If you remember this story, perhaps you might recall that the Grinch is mean, hateful and just despises the people of Whoville because they celebrate Christmas with so much noise, noise noise! The main reason the Grinch is so mean is because his heart is two sizes too small. Because of this, he makes the goal of his life and the lives of those around him to be as miserable as he is. The Grinch then comes up with a plan to try to destroy Christmas for the Whos in Whoville by stealing all of their Christmas presents, decorations and food on Christmas Eve. However, by the end of the story, the tables turn and the Grinch is so overwhelmed by the love, goodness and kindness of the Whos that his heart grows from being two sizes too small to two sizes too big. That is, his heart grows four sizes and he ends up being a compassionate selfless Grinch. He becomes a good example of what is possible when the Spirit of Christ’s birth and the transformation of knowing Christ can bring to a person’s heart.

As we begin Advent, it is our hope that God will enable our hearts to grow and develop so that our hearts will enlarge four times! We do not want Christmas to sneak up on us and find ourselves wondering or even becoming like the Grinch! In order for this to happen, our focus verse found at Proverbs 4:23 will ground us into what we are in need of doing so that our hearts may grow. It states, “Above all else, guard your heart for it affects everything you do.”

Just, what are we called to guard? It is not the organ in our body that pumps blood-the heart- even though we know we should eat heart healthy food for this part of the body but what this verse is referring to in Hebrew as ‘nefesh”. This means what is the soul, yourself, your life, mind, living being, desires, emotions and passion, that is, the inner being of a person- what makes you unique as an individual. What is in your heart defines who you are!

As we prepare to welcome Christ into our midst again, we need to prepare our hearts for transformation from the inside out. This transformation includes focusing on purity, passion,

patience and peace in our life. The first step is developing a pure heart. But how we do define what is pure?

Ivory bar soap has been around since 1840 is known to be 99.44% pure as compared to the hard and vegetable oil-based castile soap available since that time. But what else do we know or hope is pure? What about honey? How might we test if it is pure? To test for its purity honey, when exposed to any kind of heat or flame should remain unburned. To perform this test, try dipping a matchstick/cotton bud in honey and then light it. If it burns, that means the quality of your honey is pure. Pure honey also sinks in a glass of water. And speaking of water, to ensure it is pure and clean, we often use filters on the taps or in jugs. A pure heart however cannot be tested to see if it floats like ivory soap, sink in water or filtered out, a pure heart may only exist because of God and our prayer for this change to happen.

Psalm 51:10 states: Create in me a clean heart O God; renew a right spirit within me. How does God take our heart and make it pure? It is a three-step process.

- 1) Admit that your heart is impure. –This means stating you have been wrong and that motives and intentions, thoughts and desires are not always pure.

We must admit to the problem so a solution is possible. We have all sinned and disobeyed God and so we all have some aspect of impurity in our life. But because we have impure hearts we need to be forgiven or we will not experiencing God. Our reading from Matthew 5 states “Blessed are those whose hearts are pure for they will see God. We will experience God’s power and presence in our life. We will be able to understand when he gives us guidance. We will be with him forever in heaven.

- 2) Believe that God can purify our hearts. As a church family, we are people with differences that may define us as individuals: young, old, experienced learning. One thing that is certain is that we have all sinned. We are a group of sinners, but as a community of faith we also believe that we may be forgiven of all sin and have the assurance that forgiveness does occur if we believe. We cannot forgive ourselves, but need to believe that God can cleanse our heart.

3) Commit our hearts fully to God. The third part is to trust God enough to give Him our heart, that is, our inner self so that our lives may be changed. How much do you trust other people? Well you might say, it depends upon the person. You should trust your spouse, children, co-workers, friends, right? How much do you trust God? Trusting in God saves you from the consequence of an impure heart. When you trust God, He is with you and you begin following Him with your life. You are forgiven of sin and your heart becomes pure. And God no longer sees you as impure but now you are open to receive direction for how to fully live for him.

God will work in you just like he had little CindyLou Who ask the Grinch as he was taking everything from her house a very simple question: why? He told her a lie because he did not know what to say to this little girl. What about you? What will your answer be? Are you willing to trust God to open your hearts to Him? We must remember that God has been standing at the door of your heart and waiting for you to answer and let him in. Now is the time to answer! Now is the time to let Him in so that your heart may become pure. Now is the time so that you will grow in faith and come to know the Christ of Christmas whom we await in new and exciting ways. Now is the time to trust and believe so that your heart will enlarge and you will change to be the best person God made you to be! Now is the time to develop a pure heart through God's grace and love.

Let us pray. God of love we pray in these moments that you would take away impure thoughts, motives and life choices so that we may become completely pure in your sight. We pray to you because our hearts are not fully committed to you; for we are unsure of who we are and who we might be in your sight. There are also parts of us that we refuse to give up even though we know that living a pure life means living with you forever. Help us to live heart fully for you to enlarge our hearts as we await the coming of your Son Christ Jesus into our lives once again. We ask these things in the name of Jesus our coming Saviour. Amen.