

“A Broken Heart”

Joel 2:12-19

© Rev. Matthew M. Garred, February 17, 2008, permission is granted to make up to 5 paper copies to share with family and friends provided no changes are made to the original text, and there is no cost to the recipient. All other rights reserved.

(Disclaimer: The printed version of my sermons will rarely if ever be exactly the same as what is preached. The Holy Spirit often calls to mind additional examples and stories as I deliver a message that may not appear in the printed version. In the same way, some written sections may be changed or omitted in the delivery.)

Christmas is barely over, and here we are at Ash Wednesday already. Certainly I’ve heard a lot of people, myself included, comment on how early Lent and Easter are this year. So I took a look back and refreshed my memory on just how we determine these dates each year.

Easter is always on the first Sunday following the full moon that falls on or after March 21st. Ash Wednesday is determined by counting back 40 weekdays from Easter Sunday. The earliest that Easter can possibly fall is on March 22nd, and this year we hit March 23rd. The good news is, it will never get much earlier than what we have this year.

The even better news is that as we enter the season of Lent, a time of sober reflection and repentance, we know that Easter is on the way – we know that because Easter is the light at the end of the Lenten darkness that defines both where the darkness begins and where it ends.

Of course the darkness really began when Satan deceived Adam and Eve, and they sinned. In that moment of sin, they were plunged into spiritual darkness – into spiritual death. The God they had loved and walked with in the cool of the evening was suddenly frightening to them, and they hid in the garden.

Ever since, people have been prone to stray from God; prone to turn away from the light and live in the darkness of sin. In fact, Genesis 6:5 says, **“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”**

If we’re honest with ourselves, ever one of us can relate to that judgment. Thankfully, since we have been renewed by our faith in Christ, maybe not every inclination of our hearts is evil, but certainly more than enough of them are.

Our neighbor gets a new Cadillac, Mercedes, Porsche or whatever, and we covet that car. We have thoughts that cross our minds like “I deserve a car like that.” Maybe we even go out and buy one, in spite of the fact it may not be the best thing for us or for our family. Or maybe it’s not a car, maybe it’s a boat or camper or atv? Maybe it’s a hot tub, or pool.

Maybe it has nothing to do with our neighbor; we just want more – more of whatever it is we like. Greed is promoted throughout our culture. You can’t live without this latest gizmo. Don’t you deserve this latest time saving gadget? Treat yourself at this expensive, top of the line spa, you’ve earned it.

You have a right to unimpeded travel on the road, so when that doesn’t happen – road rage.

You want things to go your way, and when they don’t, we “hate” that person who messed it up.

What’s the harm in a little gossip, anyway? I only told my best friend...and maybe a few others. (PAUSE)

You know the sinful desires of your heart – if I didn't name them here, you can certainly name them yourself. As long as we live in the flesh we will battle the corrupted heart with its desires. We will struggle to overcome its wants with the will of God revealed in His word.

Part of that struggling is to keep honest accounts with God; to confess our sinfulness and our specific sins. In other words, we need to repent. The repentance God desires is not just an outward repentance of words spoken thoughtlessly, but a true repentance – a true turning from sin to God – that comes from our heart – that consumes our whole heart.

Joel 2 tells us **“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments.** In the Israelite culture it was the custom to rend – or tear – one's garment as a sign of mourning or grief – including grief over one's own sins. The problem was, some people would make the outward sign without any inner corresponding grief.

God calls us to truly grieve over our sins, the way He does. It was, after all, our sins that put Jesus on the cross. It was our sins that made all that suffering necessary. Don't just rend your clothes, rend your heart – have a broken and contrite heart before God, because when we really do examine ourselves, and have our hearts break over our sin, then God has some promises for us.

Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Psalm 34:18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

The Lord is close to us right now. He came to us in the flesh, and because of His love, He gave his own body and blood for our sins. The very body that suffered and died is the same one that rose again from the dead never to die again, and it is the same body and blood that come to us through Holy Communion to assure us of God's forgiveness and strengthen us to resist the wickedness of the devil, the world, and even our own sinful flesh.

Christ has set us free from our bondage to guilt. While we grieve our sins, we also know that because of Christ they can no longer condemn us. Our hearts, regenerated by Christ, turn instead to God, and to His ways more and more and we continue to grow in our faith, and as the Holy Spirit continues His work of Sanctification in us.

We are not alone, **“We walk by faith, not by sight,”** but we still are not alone. We have the great comforter, the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us, so that we may remain steadfast in the faith and so that our broken hearts may be mended; mended not just for life in this world, but that they may keep right on beating into eternity with our God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If you find that you've wandered a bit from the Lord like the Israelites had, then return to him now. You have his promise that he will be close to those whose hearts break over their own sins. He will be close, and He will forgive and restore life.

Dear friends, this is the ultimate reward of our faith – that our hearts broken by sin, will be healed by our loving God so that we may be with Him always – that one day, we will see Him face to face, and know His love and His glory perfectly. In Jesus name. Amen.