

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

St. John, the apostle, wrote: *"Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything."* (1 John 3:20).

**The "heart."** Not the actual organ that pumps blood, but the center of our feelings and emotions. We like to talk about people who have "heart," people who are loving, compassionate and have empathy for others. While a person's brain is the center of all reasoned thought, and critical to our health and welfare, the "heart" is elevated in importance above the brain. Why? Because "love" is valued as the greatest of human attributes.

American Christianity over the last five decades has embraced the "heart." If you were to attend one of these churches, it wouldn't take long for you to recognize their emphasis on the "heart." You see, they teach that **everything to do with salvation happens in your "heart."** From the book, "Has American Christianity Failed?" (Wolfmueller, B., St. Louis: CPH, c. 2016, p. 118), the author states:

- "It is in my heart where the Lord moves me, touches me, talks to me."
- "It is in my heart that I make the decision to follow the Lord,
- "In my heart I resolve to do better."
- "In my 'decision for Christ,' I am both 'inviting Jesus to live in my heart' and, at the same time 'giving my heart to Jesus.'"
- "Everything important, everything having to do with salvation, everything connected to the Gospel is happening on the inside, in the theater of my heart."
- "The locus of God's action is inside."

In the process of elevating the "heart" to the apex of spiritual life, the **external work of God** is abandoned or discredited. What do I mean by this? First, they teach that everything that happens outside of the "heart" is "work." For instance, for most American Christians, Baptism is a good work that **you** must do for God. It's external to the heart, and therefore must be considered "work". The Lord's Supper is external and therefore something that **you** must do in remembrance of Jesus. Because of this, the American Christian church concludes that there are **no blessings or spiritual benefits** in Baptism or the Lord's Supper, because both happen "outside your heart."

Second, **the importance of the Word of God, the Bible**, shrinks in American Christianity. After all, the Word is outside of the "heart." The Word is processed by the brain. It includes the Law of God, which does not make you "feel" uplifted and alive. To the American Christian, it's better to "feel" God's presence, to listen for that still small voice that will guide you. In the process, you don't have to hear the Law and its condemnation of your life of sin. After all, "The Word only leads to confusion and uncertainty."

Does anyone hear **Satan** in all of this? It was Satan who said to Eve in the Garden of Eden, *"Did God really say...?"* (Gen. 3:1). **Satan** wants to tear the church away from God's Word, and move you to look for God inside of your "heart." And in the process, **you will die**. Again, from Bryan Wolfmueller's insightful book:

"If God is working only on the inside, then any confidence in the Lord is bound up to my subjective experience. If God brings blessings only to my heart, then my confidence in those blessings is bound up to my feelings. The heart is shifty, unstable, tossed to-and-fro like a ship on the sea. By

refusing to see blessing and grace outside of ourselves, American Christianity creates a void of certainty and confidence." (p. 119).

**God works through the "externals."** His promise to us is that He will come to us in Word and Sacraments, to bestow and sustain our life in Him. God never says that He will come to us through dreams and whispers and feelings placed by Him in our heart. Never. Yes, the Old Testament stories about God (most, prior to His written Word) coming to people in dreams or speaking to them directly are true. But we must not confuse this with living under the New Covenant, sealed for us in the Christ's blood shed on the cross.

**Baptism** comes to us and changes us from the outside. Listen to St. Paul: *"He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life"* (Titus 3:5-7). "He saved us..." This is **not** a work done by man. This is **God's work** for our benefit.

**The Lord's Supper** comes to us and changes us from the outside. Listen to these words: *"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"* (1 Cor. 10:16). And St. John: *"But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."* **Notice that we don't cleanse ourselves.** It's **not** the heart that makes us clean. It's Jesus' own blood that comes to us in the Lord's Supper that does this for us.

Finally, **the Word of God is light and life.** The heart will mislead us from time to time. But the Word never falters. It's the Rock of our salvation. It's the unchanging basis of our certainty and hope for the future. God knew that the heart was not reliable, so **He gave us the Spirit that points outside of ourselves to the cross.** Security and life is found by clinging to the cross, for in this trust we have everything we need for salvation.

So when you're tempted by Satan to trust your heart instead of God's unchanging Word, go to the Word for comfort and the strength. In God's word you'll find all that you need to fight the good fight, and finish the race victoriously. And give thanks to God that you have a church that refuses to follow Satan and the world when they try to lead us away from God's Word and Sacraments. To Him be all the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Pastor Travis