

We could call February HEART MONTH, we have Valentine's Day. We talk about happy hearts, healthy hearts, broken hearts, weak hearts, damaged hearts, empty hearts in physical, emotional and spiritual terms. We describe some people as hard hearted, others as cold hearted, others having hearts full of love, warmth and compassion. We talk about loving people from the bottom of our hearts. Some wax poetic like Shakespeare as he writes a sonnet: "How do I love thee, let me count the ways....."

The Bible is full of a variety of references to the spiritual heart, both positive and negative. Some are comforting and others unnerving: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth..." "Their heart is far from Me..." "Because your heart is proud....." "For the hardness of your heart..." You get the picture of the negative. Now, on the positive: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and strength..." "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart..." "So take heart, I have overcome the world..."

"Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Mark 6:50) were words spoken by the Lord Jesus to His disciples on that stormy night on the sea of Galilee. They looked around and saw only danger, trouble and disaster, like we often do in our lives. But all the while the Lord Jesus had His eye on them, and came walking to them on the water. He knew their fears, and when He got into the boat the wind ceased. An interesting phrase follows (you recall this is immediately after the event we know as the Feeding of The Five Thousand) "And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." That is amazing, that they didn't catch on, but that is often where we are, somewhat forgetting what we have learned and experienced about our loving, steady, magnificent God and just looking around in fear. That's sometimes where we are in our circumstances, forgetting "that He saw them in their distress," forgetting that the Lord Jesus sees us in our distress as well. But He keeps coming to us. Sometimes we don't recognize Him, like they thought He was a ghost, but He keeps coming to us not only in our weakness, but because we are weak and need Him so desperately. He says to them: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" without quizzing them, challenging them or demeaning them. In like manner He keeps coming to us in our weakness and fear, to wrap us up in His heart of love, mercy, grace and forgiveness reassuring that He always has His eye on us. Whatever the frightening scenarios might come our way in life Jesus, the One who gave His life for us, comes and says: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

And so we can move on from one day to another. This heart month we respond to our Savior's loving heart as well as saying and praying: "Lord, take my hand and lead me along life's way" knowing He has a heart for each of us.

Take heart! We will get through this and other things, Pastor Lemke

I live in the past a lot. Mostly I do that through photos and old pictures. As I look through new and older photo books and notice some photos hanging on the walls, they always take me into the past. I wish I could take some photos that would take me into the future, but that just isn't possible. All of us would probably like to have some glimpse into the future at certain times, but I think that would generally be overwhelming. Even looking at some photos of events from the past is overwhelming, especially old newspapers. I for one am glad I don't know what the future holds.

And, I for one am also glad to know who holds the future. “My times are in Thy hands,” is a very comforting verse from the Scripture. As we page through the scriptures reading about the past, we also experience some comfort for the present as well as the future. We see how God has rescued and restored, punished and forgiven, healed and helped. How He has made even the most unusual and difficult circumstances work together for the good of those who love Him. We reflect on how God loved the world and sent His Son to become our Savior, canceling our sins in the past so they we would be free in the present and the future, forgiven and restored.

On the basis of the past we do know that Christ came to be with people, that He comes to be with us now, and that we can expect Him to come again in the same way as the disciples saw Him ascend into heaven. As He came to be present with us here on earth we know He will come and take us to be present with Him in heaven forever.

The past leads into the present, and the present leads into the future, and as time marches on (something also that is part of God's design) we know He has it all covered, that He has His eye on us, that He has good in mind for us, that the victory over death will be ours because of Him.

It's good to review the past, to remember births, marriages, celebrations, and other happy times, and also to remember times of war, sickness, unsettledness, loss and death, so that we can grow because of them. “Those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it.” We acknowledge the past but we dare not live in it. And we rejoice in the fact that God opens the door to a new day for us in the present so that we can look forward to the future even without knowing the details, but knowing the big picture that we are in His hands through time for eternity. Sometimes we might feel like strangers here, but we know heaven will be our home.

During the interim: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

PASTOR LEMKE

Happiness is sometimes hard to find. Maybe contentment would be a better commodity to seek. - In Psalm 13 the Psalmist focuses on contentment in the latter part of the Psalm. In the early part he is just overwhelmed by all he sees around him, by all he experiences in life. You can just feel his pain. We are often in the same scenario as we move along from day to day wondering when this pain, this problem will go away, or at least change a bit for the better not for the worse. But we are God's redeemed people, so in spite of, we have contentment.

As we move into the Lenten Season with Ash Wednesday having been February 17 we remember the downward spiral of so many things in the life of Christ. As he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane He, too, wishes things to be different, to be easier, to change for the better. Betrayals, scourging, spitting, nailing, pain, loneliness all were in the offing, and He knew it. Rather than letting those terrible things overwhelm Him, He prays and says to the Father, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." So he leaves the garden to be arrested, condemned and crucified, all because He trusted the Father to see Him through. - Throughout Lent we kind of tag along, like the disciples, watching, observing, but keeping our personal distance to not be too involved. - But if we only do that through Lent, we have missed the season, and have missed the Savior. We need to remember that the Lord's Christ was a man on a mission, coming into our world as one of us, to experience and endure life as one of us, to become one offering for sin for all of us, and with His eye on the victory over sin, death and the devil, He was able to hang in there, even if it meant hanging on a cross. His final words become significant: "Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit." That wasn't the first time, it was His way of life all the time, to trust the Father, to see the Father, to see the victory. And that victory was given on the third day when He rose from the dead. And it is ours!

PSALM 13 from Leslie Brandt's PSALMS FOR NOW:

O God, sometimes You seem so far away.

I cannot in this moment sense Your presence or feel Your power.

The darkness enveloping me is stifling. This depression is suffocating.

How long, O God, do I have to live in this void? O God how long?

Break into this black night, O God; fill this vast emptiness.

Enter into my conflict lest I fall, never to rise again.

I continue to trust in Your ever-present love.

I shall again discover true joy in my relationship with You.

I will proclaim Your praises, my Lord, for You will never let me go!

The Lord Jesus entered into our conflict, fought the battle and won the victory. This Lent may we not just watch or observe, but spiritually and emotionally enter into the journey with Christ, and continue our journey in life continuing to trust in the Father's ever present love as we remember His victory and already celebrate ours. - That is beyond happiness, that is contentment.

May the peace which passes all understanding from the Spirit to you filling you with contentment.

PASTOR LEMKE