

## Your Cheatin' Heart

Luke 6:17-26

In every machine, gizmo, tool, and implement designed by human ingenuity, there always seems to be one malfunction, one fatal flaw, one fault that spells doom for the entire contraption.

You know it's bad when the auto mechanic solemnly pronounces over your unmoving carcass of a car "it's the transmission." You know you're in trouble when the washing machine repairer proclaims "it's the water pump." You know it's curtains when the furnace maintenance expert just shakes his head, and hands you your heavy coat and a box of matches.

The worst tool diagnosis of all? The dreaded words uttered by the techno geek teenager sitting at your keyboard: "Your hard drive crashed." Visions of months, even years of work - all your files, graphs, numbers, research, all lost forever in some silicon abyss – suddenly cloud your sight.

Sadly, I've had a hard drive crash. And the only way to recover the data locked inside was to send the hard drive to some talented computer wizard who was able to recover portions of all the data I had backed up. But like that favorite doll salvaged out of the toilet by the plumber, it never seems to be in quite the same shape when you finally get it back as it was when it went in. Recovered files, like recovered toys, take a lot of cleaning up.

Crashing your computer's hard drive is such a disaster because the hard drive is the heart of your machine. When the hard drive is lost, nothing else functions properly. Without its central core, it's heart, the complex web of information stored inside is torn apart, losing all sense and structure. A hard drive is really a "heart drive." When your "heart drive" fails, your entire machine is doomed to death.

**Men and women of faith have a "heart drive"** as well. In today's text Jesus voices for the first time some of the convictions and commitments that lie at the heart of his kingdom-of-God-faith. The Sermon on the Plain, as it is known in Luke, reveals to Jesus' listeners the "spiritual heart" of the faith he came to earth to embody.

Jesus pointedly proclaims this message in front of his newly chosen twelve apostles, those who will physically constitute the heart of the first generation of the church. It's crucial that those who will pump the blood supply of this new faith community properly represent and proclaim the genuine heart of Jesus' mission and message.

From the opening words of the Sermon on the Plain, the Beatitudes in today's text, we need take to heart one simple truth – God's kingdom, God's love and mercy, extends towards those society has decreed outcast, inadmissible, unloved, and unwanted.

The Kingdom of God is open to all. There are no unsought ones in God's Kingdom. A divine love that refuses to follow social dictates and boundaries resides at the heart of the Jesus faith.

In Jewish thought the heart is not seen as the seat of emotion. That distinction is reserved for the bowels, the organ which most registers one's emotional state. In Hebrew texts the heart functions to relay thoughts and tasks, belief and behavior, and all that is central to an individual's very being. But it's the bowels that share emotions.

How many songs have been based on the theme of "You stole my heart" or "You're a heart-stealer?" Unlike the sentimentalized "heart-stealing" that goes on in pop-music and country and western song lyrics, biblical references to heart-stealing are serious accusations.

Heart-stealing was tantamount to taking another's whole sense of self. 2 Samuel 15:16 bemoans that "**Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel.**" By replacing the loyalty and fidelity of the people to their divinely-appointed King David, Absalom's "heart-stealing" was ultimately a capital offense.

Proverbs 4:23 warns those who would be faithful and righteous to "**Watch over [or keep] your heart**" so that it remains safe from thievery by others. Heart-thieves, like Absalom, treat others as objects – using them as means to achieve an end.

Absalom kissed and glad-handed every petitioner from every tribe who came seeking a judgment from King David. It was part of his plan to undermine David and grab the throne for himself.

Even today, while you may not realize it, **your heart is assaulted by a chorus of siren songs--** all trying to lure your heart away from your head.

- "Have it your way!" (Burger King)
- "You are so ready!" (IBM)
- "Just Do It!" (Nike)
- "Shouldn't Your Baby Be a Gerber Baby?" (Gerber)
- "Engineered Beyond Belief!" (Nissan)
- "I'm Worth It!" (L'Oreal)
- "Where I Belong" (Princess Cruise Lines)

Every commercial that bombards you daily is a blatant attempt to steal your heart. The sellers have no real concern for you, for your health or well-being, for your financial security.

McDonald's wants your loyalty to be to their french fries, not your arteries. Nike wants a new pair of sneakers on your feet, no matter how many pair of sneakers are already cluttering your closet floor. MasterCard wants your indebtedness, not your family's financial stability.

There are other heart stealers among us as well.

- The television that claims your attention when you could be playing with your kids.
- Your job – when it consumes all your energy, all your time, all your inspirations.
- Your addictions - be they drugs, alcohol, food, tobacco, sex, gambling, shopping - whatever you find yourself planning your life around so that particular activity always has first priority.

How completely opposite is God's offer to redeem our heart. God wants to re-create within "our cheatin' hearts" a new heart that throbs for others first and ourselves second. God doesn't "steal" our heart but gives us a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26).

A sure sign that this is not just another thievin' human heart is that the first thing we do with this new heart is to give it away. We give our new heart over to God, freely, with no strings attached. And then we give it to others – to the least, the last, and the lost.

**How healthy is your heart drive?** Heart-drive crashes can occur not only within our individual hearts but also in our church hearts. When the heart drive of the Christian faith – The Beatitudes – is nibbled away by peripheral concerns like . . .

- what kind of music the choir performs?
- who gets to be on the board of deacons?
- how much of the budget is allocated for re-modeling the sanctuary?
- how the church building and grounds used during the week?

- The mistake printed in the bulletin.
- The birthday listing that was omitted or wrong.
- The change in worship style – be in the Friendship Pads we no longer have to the bulletin size we use.

Every time we act like children in church the "heart" of a Christ-centered, kingdom-of-God incarnated faith is hollowed out.

Without a heart-drive that beats for those that aren't there...Without a heart-drive that is pumping blood for those in need...the church crashes just as surely as a diseased hard-drive crashes your computer's ability to function.

Martyr Hippolytus once wrote of Christ in these terms: His divine spirit gave life and strength to the tottering world, and the whole universe became stable once more, as if the stretching out, the agony of the Cross, had in some way gotten into everything.

"For me," writes author Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, "He (Jesus) has gotten into everything. I see Him in the timely, unaffected gestures of friendship and in the unruly passions of human love; I see Him in the face of a doctor who serendipitously entered my life at a time when I thought I had no more life left.

I saw Him once and will see Him forever in a dead teacher of mine, who rescued my injured spirit. I see him in my daughter's merry eyes and in the merry play of her mind; I see him in my son's hands, the hands of a painter who loves the given world."<sup>i</sup>

Where do you see Him? And is he seen in you?

- Has He gotten into your heart drive?
- Can you see Him in the outcasts and outsiders? Can other people see Him in you?
- Is your heart-drive strong and sure? Is this church's heart-drive safe and secure?
- Is our heart-drive in danger of crashing?

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<sup>i</sup> "Alone in a Lofty Place," New York Times Magazine, 7 xii 1997, 73.