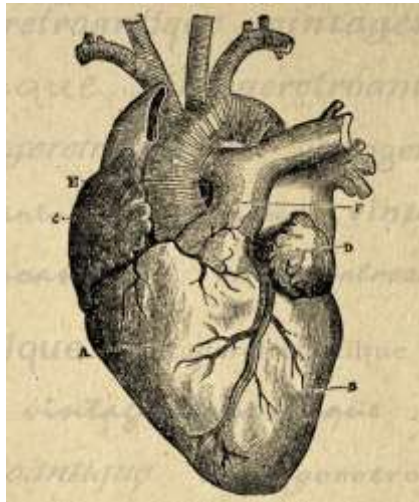


## Heart Trouble

(a message for SVUMC Vespers, 7/12/17)

I am Zhenya Knoche, a certified lay servant in the United Methodist Church, speaking tonight on “heart trouble”.

What do you think of when you hear the word “heart”?



Do you think of that pump inside of your chest, which keeps beating



all your life? Or do you think of a stylized “heart” such as is pictured in Valentines?

(p. 1 of 9, Vespers text “Heart Trouble”)



Today I will use the physical heart as an extended metaphor, or model, of the heart we speak of symbolically. I warn you that such a metaphor is never an exact correspondence, but it can give insights, and can give us a new way to visualize important concepts.

We must first consider what the symbolic meaning of “heart” is, in the Bible - since in most of the several hundred references it is used symbolically. We think of the heart as the seat of the emotions. The Biblical authors also talked of the heart as the seat of the intellect and the will. It was the central core of our being - very close to the meaning of “soul”.

Given that understanding, let us look at the diagnosis of heart trouble, the treatment, and the aftercare.

Our physical heart may be diagnosed with various problems, such as hardening of the arteries, coronary blockages, atrial fibrillation, etc. The

most serious is heart failure, where the heart is no longer able to pump sufficient blood to sustain the body.

Sometimes the Bible talks about a hardened heart - but elsewhere it goes further and describes the unregenerate heart as being full of wickedness. And remember that God knows what other people don't: what is in our heart. For example, in Jeremiah 17, verses 9 and 10, we read

**“The most cunning heart— it’s beyond help. Who can figure it out? I, the LORD, probe the heart and discern hidden motives, to give everyone what they deserve, the consequences of their deeds.” (Jeremiah 17: 9-10, CEB)**

(This scripture, as with all my quotations tonight, is from the Common English Bible.)

Also, in Mark 7, verses 20 to 23:

“It’s what comes out of a person that contaminates someone in God’s sight,” [Jesus] said. “It’s from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God’s sight.” (Mark 7:20-23)

Our hearts are ill, and need God’s healing.

(p. 3 of 9, Vespers text “Heart Trouble”)

There are various treatments for problems with our physical hearts. Sometimes medication helps; some problems need stents, or pacemakers or defibrillation. But for the most serious problems a heart transplant is needed.

Note that a patient cannot do a heart transplant herself; it requires a surgeon. Also it requires a donor heart: someone has to die to provide that heart.

In some places the Bible refers to various things which do the heart good. But the most drastic solution - which we all need at some point - is a spiritual heart transplant.

Replacing the heart is referred to in several places. Ezekiel 11, verse 19 says,

**“<sup>19</sup> I will give them a single heart, and I will put a new spirit in them. I will remove the stony hearts from their bodies and give them hearts of flesh.”  
(Ezekiel 11:19)**

Jeremiah 24:7 says

**“ I will give them a heart to know me, for I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.”  
(Jeremiah 24:7)**

And from my main passage tonight, Ezekiel 36, verses 24 through 28,

**<sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations, I will gather you from all the countries, and I will bring you to your own fertile land.**

**<sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be cleansed of all your pollution. I will cleanse you of all your idols.**

**<sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove your stony heart from your body and replace it with a living one,**

**27 and I will give you my spirit so that you may walk according to my regulations and carefully observe my case laws. 28 Then you will live in the land that I gave to your ancestors, you will be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:24-28)**

Note that we cannot give ourselves a new heart; only God can give it to us. And it also requires a death - the death of Christ.

The Spirit of God - or Christ - is said to live in this new heart. It has God's instructions engraved on it. Since it is a living heart, it can grow. The new heart has faith in God - as it says in Romans 10, verses 9 and 10,

**“Because if you confess with your mouth  
“Jesus is Lord” and in your heart you have  
faith that God raised him from the dead, you  
will be saved. Trusting with the heart leads  
to righteousness, and confessing with the  
mouth leads to salvation.”  
(Romans 10:9-10)**

Then we are able to follow the first and greatest commandment,

***“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37)***

I want to make a side comment here about so-called “piggyback” transplants. In most medical heart transplants, the old, sick, heart is removed first. However, in a few cases it is left in, with the new heart working alongside it.

The scriptures I have referred to so far speak about removing the old heart. However, some passages speak of an old nature and a new nature coexisting (and battling each other). One such is Romans 7, verses 21 to 23.

**So I find that, as a rule, when I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me. I gladly agree with the Law on the inside, but I see a different law at work in my body. It wages a war against the law of my mind and takes me prisoner with the law of sin that is in my body. (Romans 7:21-23)**

Most of us do feel as if the old nature is still there with the new. In this case, it is especially important to feed the new and starve the old.

The transplanted heart needs some aftercare to keep it healthy. After a physical heart transplant, special drugs are needed to keep the body from

rejecting the new heart. Also, if the transplant recipient is going to live a long time, they need to be careful what they eat, to do appropriate exercise, and avoid harmful substances.

If God has given you a new spiritual heart, you also need to do some things to keep it healthy. Feed it with reading the Word of God, with prayer, and with worship. Exercise it by loving and serving others and by letting them know what God has done for you. And avoid poisoning it by wallowing in temptation.

I pray, with the apostle Paul in Ephesians 3, verses 16 to 19,

**“I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you’ll have the power to grasp love’s width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you’ll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:16 -19)**

If you have never had a spiritual heart transplant, feel free to talk with the pastor or me afterwards about how to get one. If you have, I urge you to keep that new heart healthy.

Amen