

The Power of Desire Embedded in our Hearts

John Knox Presbyterian Church, 109 SW Normandy Road, Seattle, Washington 98166

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Lent III

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Matthew 5:27-30; Mark 12:28-34

Matthew²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his **heart**.²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Mark²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one'³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him."³³ To love him with all your **heart**, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions."

Memory Verse

"Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'³¹ and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Mark 12:30-31

Two juxtaposed opposites that are really different expressions of the same capacity for desire:

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

St. Augustine, 354-430, Bishop of Hippo, North Africa: The Confessions

"...the word 'lust' is taken to include normal interest in sex..."

US Supreme Court, in Washington-state case Brockett V. Spokane Arcades, 1985

What is Jesus doing here in these two passages that form our scripture for this morning?

Engaging in the same juxtaposition of seeming opposites:

1. Desiring God the Creator – **love** - the ancient Old Testament commandments summarized in two that include the **heart**, the inner core person;
2. Desiring what God has made, creation – **lust** - Making it clear that the **heart**, the inner core person, is where God has placed our capacity for a desire that can be distorted.

President Jimmy Carter: "The Bible says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Christ said, I tell you that anyone who looks on a woman with lust has in his **heart** already committed adultery. I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my **heart** many times.... " Interview, Playboy Magazine, November 1976

Romans 1:21-23 ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish **hearts (kardia)** were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being **and....**"

AND.....

- Desire (lust) for possessions _____
- Desire (lust) for power _____
- Desire (lust) for position _____
- Desire (lust) for places _____
- Desire (lust) for persons _____
- Desire (lust) for ? _____

THE TWO-EDGED SWORD

So our capacity for desire is a two-edged sword within. Cutting both ways, it involves embracing what is required and shunning what causes this capacity for desire to do great damage to ourselves and others.

Q 70: What is the Seventh Commandment?

A: The Seventh Commandment is “Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Q 71: What is required in the Seventh Commandment?

A: The Seventh Commandment requires the preservation of our own and our neighbor’s purity, in **heart**, speech and behavior.

Q 72: What is forbidden in the Seventh Commandment?

A: The Seventh Commandment forbids all impure thoughts, words and actions.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, 1648 – Presbyterian Church (USA) Book of Confessions

Q: What is the relationship between our capacity for desire and our **beliefs**?

Q: What is the relationship between our capacity for desire and our **behavior**?

Capacity for desire and **addictive behavior** = that which is desired not only does not satisfy the desire but binds the person to a repeated cycle of seeking in the addiction (food, gambling, pornography, alcohol, drugs) what cannot be found there. Only a focus of our capacity for God directed God-ward is freedom-filled.

Q: So how does this capacity for desiring the Triune God work when it is directed God-ward?

It is always three-dimensional/directional: **(1)** God, **(2)** neighbor, **(3)** self.

Q: If it is so-directed, does it satisfy?

“...our religious desire is never satisfied in God but rather deepened there. We cannot grasp God, not because God is absent, but rather because God is always given in excess of our ability to grasp.” Peter Rollins, How (Not) To Speak of God, Paraclete Press © 2006

Jesus puts it this way: “...*whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst... If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.*” John 4:14; 7:37

Q: So what is your take-away from this morning’s teaching? _____

Unison prayer response from the Book of Common Prayer

“O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit that we may be devoted to you with **our whole heart** and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

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