Sermon 15a 2014: What’s in your Heart? God’s is Full of Love.

Introduction: A Matter of the Heart

There’s a commercial series for a credit card company

That’s been running for too many years, hyping the buying power and strength

That will be yours and mine when we use their credit card.

The series began with hordes of Vikings and raiders showing up at the time of purchase

To suggest what might happen to us if we don’t have the right credit card company;

And then moved to the cute, with Vikings on vacation using their credit cards

To buy all sorts of odd and often trivial things;

And now to famous spokes persons like Alec Baldwin & Samuel L Jackson

Doing amazing things and then asking the same question.

And while I can’t remember all the little stories in the commercials,

The tag line has been etched into mine and many a brain, “What’s in your wallet?”

I’ve heard the question so many times

That there’ve been moments on the way to some store

That I ask what’s in my wallet,

Rather than whether I actually have my wallet with me

Which is usually a better question for me to be asking

Since I don’t always keep close track of it.

Well, while that tag line is interesting and the materialism it suggests we give our lives to

Could spark a whole series of sermons, especially at stewardship time in the fall;

It’s not really a Christian value that we should be paying close attention to.

What’s in your wallet or in mine is not really in our top ten or even top hundred concerns

When it comes to trying to live the Christian life and imitating Jesus;

Or when it comes to our focus as this church on a mission;

A better tag line for us, for we followers of Jesus, would be,

What’s in your heart?
What’s in your heart is our question;
   It’s our question because it gives us some sense of how God is moving in us;
   Both naturally and spiritually;
   And over the course of our lives as follower of Jesus Christ;
   It’s the place where God can best mold us and change us into His likeness;
   Which, by the way, in case you were wondering, is what this Christian life is all about;
   Becoming more and more like Jesus and having a heart shaped like His.

What’s in Your Heart?
So, what’s in your heart when you look at the people around you in your life?
   Do you always see the best in the other person;
   Or do you keep track of their faults and weaknesses
   Looking for opportunities to let them know how they’re falling short?

I have a close friend in my life
   Who’s always judging and commenting on how I’m living my life;
   Why he’s still a close friend, I have no idea;
   But whatever I say or whatever I do always seems to come with a comment
   Or a suggestion as to how I could say and do something better.

He’s relentless and I imagine that he’s that way with the other people in his life;
   Not to mention with himself;
   And while comments and suggestions can be helpful from time to time;
   We have to remember that we don’t have the corner on what’s right
   And giving others the benefit of the doubt is much more gracious and loving.

In this short passage we just read from Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome;
   Paul is challenging the Roman Christians to look for the best
   In the Jews who have not come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Don’t judge them, Paul warns; instead of looking down on them in any way,
   Hope for their best and trust that God’s first promise to the Jews is still in force;
Because God is merciful to all and Jesus’ heart
   Knows that no one measures up and loves us anyway.

What’s in your heart when someone is rude or outright mean to you?
   Forgiveness or payback?

We’ve been reading the past couple of Sundays about Joseph and his brothers;
   Ten brothers who sold their brother, Joseph, into slavery out of envy;
       And then told their father that Joseph was dead; breaking the old man’s heart.

And then, in God’s strange and wonderful providence and goodness, the tables are turned
   Joseph, through many trials and ordeals, becomes the prince of Egypt;
       With the power to harm or to help these same brothers.

Look at Joseph’s response to the men who sold him into slavery;
   Joseph, on revealing who he is says, Do not be distressed,
       God meant all of this for good; Come and live in Egypt and I will take care of you.

It’s one of the most remarkable moments of forgiveness in the entire Bible
   And speaks of a heart that is filled with love and grace;
       A forgiving heart, shaped like the heart of God.

What’s in your heart when you’re thinking about helping someone in need?
   That God has put them in your path so that you can help them as God has helped you
       Or that they’re getting what they deserve for the choices they’ve made in life
           And any help you have to give comes grudgingly if it comes at all?

We have a great challenge before us in the Delaware Valley and across our land;
   Many of our schools are failing; the jobless rate is too high; we are afraid;
       People are perishing and choosing disastrous lifestyles because they have no hope.
Yet, it is easier for most of us to give money and time to faraway places;
   As individuals, as the church, and as a nation;
   Than to help those in need, who are literally our neighbors.

Jesus came to save all people, but you can always count on Him being present
   And saving whomever He is with at that moment;
Paying attention to who is in front of Him and bringing them life and love and mercy.
   Might God be calling us to a different response as followers of Jesus and as a church
   Were we to have hearts shaped like Jesus’ heart.

What’s in your heart when life gets hard and you can’t see the way forward?
   Fear and anger about the situation that you find yourself in
   Or contentment, hope, faith that God has a plan even in the darkest moments?

Both Joseph and the mother in the second part of today’s Gospel
   Are people who face hardship and darkness with a sense of hope and faith.

Joseph, sold into slavery and later put in prison, never gives up his hope in God;
   But lives with a deep contentment and faith that even when life is hard
   God is still at work, watching over him.

And the mother whose daughter is tormented by a demon has faith and hope enough
   To cry out to Jesus to help her;
   And to keep crying out on behalf of the daughter she loves until God acts;
   It is the mother’s faith, Jesus says, that allows God to work and heal the girl.

When life grows dark; when our sense of financial wellbeing is challenged;
   When the doctor gives us disappointing news;
   When people we love suffer and die;
   We can allow fear and anger to fill our hearts
   Or we can remember that God has a plan;
And though it may be slow in coming about from our perspective;
    We can let hope do its work and trust in God as Jesus does;
        Even when that plan means death on a cross and resurrection.

**Jesus and our Hearts**
What’s in your heart and my heart is a very important question for us Christians;
    Because it’s a very important question for Jesus.

There are fifty-one statements by Jesus in the Gospels involving the heart;
    And in today’s Gospel, Jesus makes it very clear
        That the health or the sickness of our hearts is revealed
            By the words that come out of our mouths
                And the actions that define our lives.

The heart is the seat or the compass of our souls
    And for most of us, it’s not always an easy chair;
        It’s not always pointing in the right direction;
            Left on our own, most of us have moments
                Where our self-centeredness, even some faithlessness, comes forth
                    And we say things and we do things
                        That don’t measure up to God’s standards or hopes for our lives.

Thankfully, by the grace of God through Jesus’ saving death on the cross;
    We are forgiven, we are made right with God;
        We can start again with softer, healthier hearts,
            Molded and shaped by God’s saving love
                So that day by day we can become more like Jesus
                    And what’s in your heart and my heart will be more like what’s in Jesus’ heart.

So allow me to invite you to ask Jesus to come into your heart again or for the first time
    Invite Jesus into your heart to clear away the darkness and self-centeredness
        And to give you a heart like His;
A heart that sees the best in other people;
    A heart that forgives first;
        A heart that helps others because you have been helped;
            A heart that is filled with faith and hope and trust in God;
                And a heart that is deeply grateful.

None of us have the capability to grow a heart like Jesus’ on our own;
    But if you and I will invite God into our hearts, He promises to come
        And you and I will be given new hearts, hearts shaped like God’s;

What’s in your heart?
Amen.