

*Sermon The Heart of the Matter: Week 1 November 6, 2016*

Jesus said, "Take care that your hearts aren't dulled by drinking parties, drunkenness, and the anxieties of day-to-day life. Don't let that day fall upon you unexpectedly, like a trap. It will come upon everyone who lives on the face of the whole earth. Stay alert at all times, praying that you are strong enough to escape everything that is to happen and to stand before the Son of Man." Every day Jesus was teaching in the temple, but He spent each night on the Mount of Olives. All the people rose early in the morning to hear Him in the temple area. Luke 21: 34-38

Jesus said... take care that your hearts aren't dulled. I always think of dull in terms of a knife blade, and how difficult and dangerous it is to cut with a dull knife. But dull also means something boring, that's tedious and uninteresting. Dull means listless, and lacking in depth, and richness and intensity of color. Dull means stupid, tiresome, and unimaginative. Wow. Jesus said, "Don't let this happen to your heart: that it (and you) become dull... boring, listless, and unimaginative."

Jesus was an observant Jew but He often found Himself at odds with Jewish religious leaders, because they focused on outward behavior (which they believed witnessed to inward and spiritual belief) but Jesus focused on the heart... on inward transformation, that led to outward behavior: compassionate hearts, and love for others, and of wonder and love for God. Jesus spoke about the human heart as the center of a person... not the mind, the will, the ego... but the heart; that fierce organ that pumps blood gushing through our veins that makes us alive; that tender organ that threatens to break apart when we're hurt, or others are hurt. Our hearts are the center of our being, where God resides. Our hearts inform and direct us how to live as followers of Jesus. The mind, the will, the ego all scream that it's impractical and too hard and it's off-putting to live as followers of Jesus... but the human heart was designed by God, for

God to live there. God designed our hearts to love, to give and receive love. And Jesus said... don't let your hearts get dull.

He said "Take care that your hearts aren't dulled by drinking parties..." which means not just parties, but constant entertainment, and frantic living, and the inability to be still, to be silent; to listen deeply in silence. From The Message translation, Jesus says, "Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping." In other words, don't get caught up in mind-freezing, spirit-numbing consumerism... but instead be mindful of all you have. Be grateful, be amazed, be awed, by all of God's goodness to you. And take time away from people, from noise, from entertainment, from doing, and just be. Don't let outward noise and activity (even good noise and activity) be constant in your life. Take time to be alone, to be with God, and to be still.

Jesus said, "Take care that your hearts aren't dulled by drunkenness..." which would include booze and drugs and food and games and anything we do to fill the emptiness within rather than to let God fill us... rather than be empty and accept that humanity is sometimes a lonely journey, and we are just sometimes empty... rather than realize that others are empty too (and maybe even more than empty but also hungry, lonely, frightened, and hopeless) and instead of obsessing about our own emptiness this could be a prompting - a nudge - from the Holy Spirit to be the hands and feet and love of Jesus for someone who needs us.

Jesus said, "Take care that your hearts aren't dulled by the anxieties of day-to-day life." This is the hardest part of what Jesus warned about. Don't let your hearts become dull (remember, that is boring, stupid, unimaginative, colorless) by being

overwhelmed by fear and worry and a to-do list that's too big to get done. Jesus taught His followers to be mindful of the moment, to see this day as the only day we have, to see God here and now, and to trust God to take care of us. We've associated meditation and mindfulness with eastern and Buddhist practices, but they're Christian practices too. Jesus said: Take care that your hearts aren't dulled... be present and mindful.

It's kind of impossible for us to not be anxious and fearful about the future, or the unknown because we all know, deep down, that we're mortal, fragile, vulnerable, and not in control. And Jesus addressed fear and anxiety and the future and mortality... by telling us that no matter what has happened, or what might happen, God knows us, and loves us. (Notice that Jesus never said that God will fix things, or that we'll never suffer, or that life isn't hard.) But He said, "I'm always with you."

One of the reasons we gather as the church is to remember together that God is always with us. And when our hearts get dull from overwork and worry and fear... and when grief and stress make it hard to believe that God is with us, we believe for each other. We lift each other up so that the waves of anxiety and responsibility and mortality that break over us don't pull us under.

Being with people who believe with us, and for us, gives us hearts fierce enough to love God with everything in us, and hearts tender enough to love all others the ways we ourselves want to be loved. That's what it is to be the church... to show up, and to encourage, and support each other to follow Jesus in the ways of love, and compassion, and service.

Today we're observing All Saint's Day (which is actually the Sunday after Halloween.) Today we remember people who have been part of our church, and part of our lives, who have died. Their faith and love are still with us, and we celebrate them. Each of us has saints... those people in our lives who've mentored us as followers of Jesus. We give thanks to God for them, and we're inspired by their lives. During our time of prayer today we'll light candles, to remember them and to praise God for the light they've left with us.

We are all saints in the making. This might be hard to believe, since being a saint usually means that a person is just too good, too good to be true... and is perhaps a martyr... and maybe even a doormat. But that's not what it means to be a saint! A saint is a person whose faith has blessed others, whose love for God has helped others love God, whose service for those in need has inspired others to serve. A saint is someone who wants children to know about the love of God, so they teach Sunday school, or Vacation Bible School. A saint is someone who cares that the seeker and the visitor and anyone longing-to-belong have Christian fellowship, and they make coffee on Sunday mornings for Friendship Time. A saint is someone who volunteers to sing in the Choir because they know that music touches people's hearts... and reminds us that all creation sings God's praises. A saint is someone who serves on a ministry team like the Finance Committee, or on the Trustees, or on Welcome and Evangelism, because they want this to be a church that welcomes all people... a church where all people can experience and express Christ's love. When we love, when we serve, when we welcome: we are saints in the making. We continue to create and maintain this church for now, for our loved ones, and for generations who are still to come.

This month is the finance campaign and our theme is Lafayette United Methodist Church is in the heart of this community, and it's the heartbeat of our common life. Being a solo-Christian is too hard. It's not even how we're designed; we were created to be in relationship with God and with others. Our church offers us relationships with others who know and love God and who offer support and encouragement to live as disciples of Jesus. We need each other, and we need the church. The days of taking for granted that the church is here, and will always be here, are over, because churches are closing. There's no time for dull hearts or halfhearted faith.

We are saints in the making, and the financial commitments we make bless all of us here, young and old, seekers, and new believers, and those established in faith. We are saints in the making because of our pledge to support a vibrant and living church... that witness to our love for God and for all others.

This month we have a verse to learn, to take to heart. Before she moved away Virginia Black told me how much it meant to her to have a memory verse, and encouraged me to continue to have scripture that we learn together. Virginia no longer worships with us (she lives in Seattle) and she's one of our saints. The November Verse for the Soul is on page 3 of the bulletin. Let's say it together, including where to find it. It reminds us of Jesus' warning to "Take care that your hearts aren't dulled."

"O Lord, I will praise You with all my heart and tell everyone about the marvelous things You do." Psalm 91:1.

Amen.