

**Heart and Soul**  
**Oak Grove Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher**  
**April 25, 2021**  
**NT I John 3:16–24**

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<sup>16</sup>We know love by this that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. <sup>17</sup>How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? <sup>18</sup>Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. <sup>19</sup>And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him

<sup>20</sup>whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup>Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; <sup>22</sup>and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

<sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

<sup>24</sup>All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this, we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

This is the word of the Lord.

When I was in high school, I worked as a dishwasher in the home for the elderly. This was not just any old person’s home. It was one that my father, as pastor of a church, helped to found so that no one would end their years alone or without resources. I had one favorite resident, my grandfather, who turned 100 years old my senior year in high school.

Grandpa's knees were a bit arthritic, and his hearing was not very good. His bright blue eyes would shine and his mind was quick with a joke or catching a football play on television. He would turn the sound down because he did not think those commentators knew anything anyway!

When Grandpa finished 8th grade his father told him it was time to quit school and get to work. For six years he worked as an iron molder in a factory, developing his muscles and strength. During that time he was active in his church. His pastor told him he had a good mind and heart, and should go back to school which he did and finished high school and college at an accelerated rate. Grandpa continued on to Princeton University and seminary where he graduated in 1906. I have his pictures of that time in my office. I positioned him so he is looking over my shoulder!

His pastor was right; grandpa had a heart and mind for ministry as he spent his career serving churches. He still enjoyed preaching to "those old folks" at the home even when he was about the oldest one there!

One day, during my senior year in high school, Grandpa asked to see me. He had something he wanted to tell me. When I came in, his eyes were as bright as ever. He said, "I've been thinking, and you should go to Princeton." I had been applying to colleges and Princeton was not even on my radar screen! He impatiently waved off my excuses and said, "No, go to college where you want. You have a good mind and heart to go on to Princeton."

I was surprised at his suggestion, particularly because going to seminary was the last thing in my adolescent head. Also, because of the time and culture, it was not as if Grandpa had many models of women in the ministry when he was around in the church. However, his deep blue eyes did not see the barriers of gender but was going right to the heart. Well I filed it away and continued with more immediate things of a high school

senior. Although he never lived to see me enter the gates of Princeton Seminary. He knew. He knew.

His words had a big impact on me in ways I could not even imagine as a self-absorbed 18-year-old. I spent quite a few years hearing one part of Grandpa's statement, that I had a good mind. Now that made me proud. I was smart, I could learn things and that is what I set about doing. I learned all that I could. Getting all the information into my brain so that I would know stuff. I did it with a sense of pride and a sense of self-entitlement.

It was not until years later that I remembered the other part of what Grandpa told me. That I had a heart for ministry. Of course, being a minister meant that I was always nice, isn't that what having a heart means? To be nice and loving, and certainly that worked for a while as well. Let's face it, sometimes I am not that nice. However, that formative conversation from my insightful grandfather, takes on a richer meaning when I have come to understand what it takes for ministry. Having a heart as a church member, a minister, or a citizen, does not mean being just being nice person. It is not the candy-coated valentine heart but a heart of biblical proportions.

The word heart is used quite a bit in the bible, 718 times to be exact for good as well as for ill. Heart is not just the love center for the ancient world but it was the seat of reason. It is what makes of the person, the soul of the person. So, when Pharaoh's heart was hardened, it didn't mean that he was a difficult person. He was beyond reason; he was unable to hear the warnings of Moses when he refused to let the people go.

King David's heart went out when he lost his son Absalom. That does not just mean he was a grieving father, it meant that he was lost when his son was so lost. His entire being was aching for his son.

In the New Testament, heart continues to be the center of one's being. In the first chapter in the Gospel of John, 1:18 reads: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." Jesus, who knows God so well, is so close to God's heart that we have the privilege to know God through Jesus.

We approach our faith with not only a good mind, but also a good heart. Our heart is the essence of our being, not just the nice and fluffy side of us. Sometimes our heart does not have the nicest picture to present; sometimes our hearts lapses into bitterness, vengeance and condemnation. Our hearts can be as stubborn as Pharaoh's. Our hearts can be blind to the acts that happen around us. Our hearts can be eclipsed with the immediate and we fail to see the broader picture.

But our hearts can also be part of the solution. There are times when our hearts help us to rise above the pettiness and nurtured our hearts to recognize God through Christ at its very core. That is the problem with the human heart in biblical perspective; our hearts can lead us toward or away from God.

Words are not enough to convey the state of our heart. To say we have a good heart when our actions do not follow, loses whatever impact we hope to accomplish. If our biblical hearts are our being, then our actions show the state of our hearts.

Preparing my mind for ministry was a start. Reading the books, grappling with the issues, writing the papers, staking out my theological arguments late into the night was the start of my ministry, but not the end itself. All the time things were going into my head and my heart, my biblical heart also needed to be nourished.

In I John, the writer speaks to a congregation in disarray. In a sense, this early church has suffered a heart attack, a metaphorical coronary,

affecting the very essence of their community. And John, who is standing on the outside of the situation, kind of like a Transitional Pastor, gives them some pastoral advice that will help to see them through this time and to continue and strengthen their ministry.

First, he tells them to follow the one who did not just tell them what to do but acted out who they are. Christ Jesus who not only spoke the words that we know but gave his life for us. He directs the confused people back to the one who put his heart into his words. As followers of Christ, they cannot keep themselves wrapped up but must also follow in Christ's way of looking beyond them. Follow Christ's example that this message is not just nice thoughts but something to stake your very life upon!

Second, the author tells them to love, not simply in word or speech, but in truth and action. Saying the words makes us nice people. The most eloquent words can hide what our actions are. We can say we want everyone to get a fair shot but if we do not do anything about it to reach that goal then it means nothing.

The writer tells these shaken believers that the truth will reassure our hearts, and when those hearts of biblical proportions condemns us, God is greater than our hearts. It is not up to us to sort out who is in the right or the wrong or how charitable one has been with another, for God is greater than all of us combined.

God knows what our hearts are capable of. God knows that we have the capacity of being generous, gracious, and overflowing with love. God also knows that those same hearts can be petty and condemning and self-serving, filled with hatred and prejudice. It is within that incredible mix of grace and sin that our hearts reside. God is greater than our hearts. If that is not enough, to hand over our turmoil and control to God, if we

still think we can handle it, God has our hearts and our minds covered. In addition, maybe that is the greatest lesson to learn.

This week we are reminded of hearts of biblical proportions for good and for ill. We are aware how callous and hard a heart can be with a knee on the neck for 9 ½ minutes. We are heartened by the presence of strangers, who happened upon the street near Cup Foods last May, who had the presence of mind to point their phones so that the world could see what happened. Even random strangers are capable of great hearts, open hearts and hearts of action.

In the closing arguments of the trial this week, the prosecutor likened those strangers to the jury. Random people, strangers to George Floyd, but with their verdict they knew and acted with their hearts.

No doubt, our hearts are capable of either truly horrific unconscionable things but also heroic and great things.

It takes nurturing our hearts to act for good. It takes trusting the heart of God to follow through and to not turn away.

My grandfather changed my life. Oh, I might have still gone into the ministry if he had not talked with me that day. God's call to our vocation is more persistent than one individual, but my grandfather changed my life in a gradual way, one of slow realization that to be in ministry; to be a follower in faith, it takes more than a good mind, it takes a good heart; it takes a good heart of biblical proportions. Amen.