

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
The First Sunday after Christmas
30 December 2012
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 2:22-40

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

The heart of man is a terrifying thing.

It's so easy to hide things away in our hearts—
our secret lusts,
our constant anger,
our overwhelming pride and self-righteousness—
it all finds a home deep inside our hearts.

On a good day, no one knows a thing about it—
on a bad day, we lash out.

Sometimes it's that last straw that finally gives—
our anger erupts into the cutting words of the mouth,
or the rage of the fist,
or the silence of deep sadness.

Sometimes we get so overwhelmed by the things around us that we can't control our heart's
lustful passions anymore.

That's where adultery springs and the filth of internet pornography arises,
where the imagination runs wild and self-control flies out the window.

This all comes from our heart, from what's inside of us—that hidden part that no one knows.
It's a terrible thing, our heart is.

So please, if you're going to offer your heart to God—
don't do it as a gift, but as an act of repentance.

God doesn't want your heart because it's so good and pure and full of right motives—
it's not, admit it.

He wants to cut it open, remove it's hidden sin, bleach it's stains, and wash it's filth away.
And then He wants to give you a new heart.

Less than a week after Christmas, while Jesus is still just a boy,
at the time of purification according to the Law,
we hear that this Jesus is one who pierces the heart.

Simeon, after singing his *Nunc Dimittis*, says to the Virgin Mother:

**“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel,
and for a sign that is opposed
(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also),
so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”** (Lk 2:34-35)

This infant Son of Mary, cute and cuddly, wrapped and warm and presented in the Temple,
 is the Lion of Judah,
 the Axe laid at the root of the trees,
 the Two-Edged Sword,
 and the Stone over which the builders will stumble!

He is the One sent to pierce the hearts of many and reveal the guilt of the world!

While next week we'll celebrate the Epiphany, the revelation of who this Jesus is—
 today is the epiphany of who *we are*—
 prideful sinners steeped in our own lust, arrogance, and ever-present anger.

Today our Lord begins His work of penetrating our hidden fortresses,
 and revealing what's really on the inside.

This will hurt.
 That's the way sin is.
 And it hurts not just you, who have to face up to the reality of your sin,
 but also those around you.

The secret lust of a husband hurts also the wife.
 The anger of a mother is felt by the children.

What's revealed on the inside has lasting consequences on those around us—
 so when your heart is revealed, just know that you and others will be hurt.

It's this work of Christ that we'd rather He not do.
 We try to avoid this sort of penetrating gaze into our secret sins as much as possible.
 We hide from Him, we run, we train our minds to flee from His presence,
 so that our sin can rest comfortably.

But old man Simeon knows better.
 He too has prayed Psalm 139:

**“Where shall I go from your Spirit?
 Or where shall I flee from your presence?
 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
 If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
 If I take the wings of the morning
 and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
 even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me.
 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
 and the light about me be night,”
 even the darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is bright as the day,
 for darkness is as light with you.”** (Ps 139:7-12)

Wherever our Lord goes, darkness turns to light.
 The hidden becomes revealed, the secret is made known.

Simeon confesses this infant to be the light of the world, the revelation of God, the one who uncovers all that we try to hide.

Now as you know, many reject Him.
 They will not fall upon Him and be broken, repenting of their sin-stained heart,
 so He will fall upon them and crush them on their pride.

But you, by God's Grace, will be broken, *are* broken,
 you are crushed by the Law, slain, and cut to the heart—
 your secret-heart is laid bare, your deeply hidden sin is revealed,
 your sinful nature has been drowned in the baptismal font
 and the new man has arisen!

You are broken, but mended;
 fallen, but risen;
 dead, but now alive!

And your mending and rising and living are all on account of the child held by Simeon
 and praised by the prophetess Anna.

You live from the font.
 Your life is now marked by this constant rhythm of repentance:
 confession and faith over and over and over again.

You live by the Word:
 the Gospel preached, the body broken, the blood sipped, and the water sprinkling.

But your life, like St. Mary's, is one marked by the sign of the cross.
 It's marked with suffering,
 "*and a sword will pierce your own soul also*".

And you will learn through this cross, through suffering, that He is all that matters.

He takes away your hiding places, your excuses; He exposes the thoughts of your heart.
 And there you learn that there is no other place to turn, nothing deep within you will do,
 no other consolation, no other hope.

Crushing and painful though it is,
 in this way your evil thoughts will be expunged, taken away, covered, *forgiven*.
 You will confess and be absolved; you will eat and you will drink,
 and there you will be united with Him who's heart is pure and right and all *for you!*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit