

What's in Your Heart?

By Bishop Peggy Johnson

Doctors have perfected many kinds of tests that diagnose heart disease. From coronary artery blockages to arrhythmia, to heart valve disease—with modern testing equipment, we can know what is in a person's physical heart.

However, when our Scriptures speak of the heart, it is far more than a body organ. The “heart” is found 762 times in the KJV Bible, and it tends to mean what it is the central core of a person's desires, wonderment and passion. It is our true best self. One cannot test this kind of heart with a stethoscope, but it is easily discerned by a person's words.

Jesus taught his disciples that eating food with unwashed hands does not defile a person: “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled?”

He goes on to assert the true test of a person's heart: “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.” (Matthew 15:17-19)

What is in our heart is evidenced by the way we talk.

What is in our heart is evidenced by the way we talk. Just listen to what a person says. Listen to yourself talk. No special equipment necessary; just listen with your ears...and your heart.

This is no little thing. The Book of James reminds us, “The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire. And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.... it is a restless evil... full of deadly poison.” (James 2:5-6, 8b)

In our current political climate, we are experiencing countless inflammatory words whose name is legion. Many of them come from a heart of racial bigotry, sexism and classism. However, we are not sitting above it all in holiness and purity. In the life of the church, mean-spirited words are spoken against one another as well. James says, “Every kind of beast and bird or reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue.” (2:7).



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Sadly, it is part of the human condition to speak unkindly. So, do we just take it as a “given” and keep on hurting one another with insults and slander? I think not! We have a God who can understand our weakness and will help us.

Paul teaches, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. And God is faithful; and he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” (I Corinthians 10:13)

May we use God’s preventive medicine for the heart disease of slander and evil words spoken against each another. Indeed, may we use that same medicine to also cure callous, even heinous actions that too often are prompted by our words. Should we be surprised that hurtful public policies and personal threats and attacks often seem to follow hateful public discourse?

May we pray and work unceasingly for a world in which everyone is respected in our thoughts, words and deeds, and where the better angels of our nature lead us to promote inclusion and equality for all. If each of us takes responsibility for what we think, say and do in this world, our church can still become part of the beloved community that God intended.

Question 1: When have you seen the power of positive words?

Question 2: When have you seen negative words cause pain and conflict?

Question 3: When has God helped you change the words you spoke or intended to speak to someone?

Check out the Book of Proverbs for some good wisdom about the use of our words: **Proverbs 11:9, 11:12, 15:1, 15:4, 16:24, 18:4, 18:20, 20:15, 25:18**

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