

The heart of darkness – opposites attract

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 6:17-26

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Robert Frost said, “The saddest thing in life is that the best thing in it should be courage.” In other words, you have to have courage to live it.

But we remember a few weeks ago, I played an interview with Brenè Brown in which she pointed out that the origin of the word “Courage” is based on the words “from the heart” and today is all about heart and happiness...and love – all of which take courage.

Let’s talk about the heart – the modern symbol of romantic love.

The Greek word is *kardia* and it forms all or part of: accord; cardiac; cardio-; concord; core; cordial; courage; credence; credible; credit; credo; credulous; creed; discord; grant; and more...much more.

You can see, even in ancient times, it was seen as the centre of things but one which contained all opposites: love and hate; kindness and cruelty; generosity and jealousy; stability and chaos. Jerimiah uses these opposites in the poetry of his form: Cursed and blessed and he shares his dark opinion of the heart: “The heart is deceitful above all things...”

For Jeramiah, the heart is permeated with evil, infinitely capable of deceiving others, as well as deceiving ourselves. Anyone with a failed romance somewhere in the dim dark past – can attest to this. It is a testament to how we are able to fool ourselves – or be fooled by others in matters of the heart.

For Jeramiah – it is the heart that tries to force us to put ourselves in the centre of things. It is the heart that teaches us how to hide our selfishness in romantic words and good deeds. He felt such deviousness comes easily to the heart – quite naturally. Poor Jeramiah.

But in this reading, God is not confused because the divine sees into every corner of every heart.

Luke picks up the poetry of opposites in his beatitudes. Each of the blessings/beatitudes is contrasted with a parallel woe: The poor-the rich; the hungry-the full; weeping-laughter; and so on. Life is about balancing opposites. even in matters of the heart and in blessings.

Life without strife is flatlined. We know now that it is the ups and downs that substantiate our gratitude.

We talk about being IN love – but you have to be IN love to fall out. What is the opposite on not being in love...of a quietude? There is one – trust me.

Valentine's Day is all about romantic love – the heart thumping, magnanimous, perhaps lustful love... It has been totally commercialised and is a really big thing in the USA.¹ What it seems to sell is happiness for a day. I've read enough Self-help books to know that when the heart is racing – that's not love but I'll come back to that...

'Happiness' is much overrated in our modern context. There are a lot of self-help books on how to be happy.

The Art of happiness

Authentic happiness

Happiness inside: how to harness the power of home for health and happiness

There's even happiness blogs and one guy who bills himself as "the happy guy" – a blog about living 'your ideal life'.

Only a few books warn people off 'the happiness trap'

And yet, psychologists and psychiatrists - actual people with degrees, know that striving for eternal happiness is a hopeless and damaging goal. It requires wrapping yourself in cotton wool and living on the planet Denial. It requires you not care or feel for the people around you or those suffering in the world.

My cousin's letter last week said, 'there are days when I wake up in the morning and ask myself, 'are you dead?' "nope" "it there coffee?" "yes" and (I) consider that a win.

It doesn't mean you can't be happy – you just can't maintain that 24/7. Sad has an important place in our development and health.

There is considerable debate about how many times 'happiness' is referred to in the Bible – but in ancient times, the whole concept of happiness was entirely different.

¹ Little known useless fact - The commercialization of Mothers' Day so disgusted the creator that she tried to get it cancelled.

It wasn't about heart-pounding love. It wasn't about waking up with a grin on your face every morning. It was about being right with God. The comfort of someone knowing your heart – being IN your heart.

It was assumed bad things would happen, hard times would fall but those who were right with God, comfortable in their relationship, would endure. They had resilience that others could not comprehend.

Ironically, a state very similar to this is what psychologists and psychiatrists try to help their clients obtain.

Which brings me back to romantic love. There is a difference between being dazzled and being content to sit in silence and companionably read a book. Love – deep love could actually be quietude: The comfort and companionship we also strive to experience with God.

It is in one who knows your heart: your flaws and shortcomings; your self-delusions and foibles and loves you consistently.

The Human Heart may be hopelessly dark and deceitful. It may be a puzzle no one can figure out but it is the house in which God dwells and that place from which courage emerges.

It is not surprising that one of the enduring symbols for Jesus is a heart with a flame. I was given an Italian one on a gold chain when I was young and I wore it for many years until I gave it to someone who needed it more than me. To be honest – I prefer to give heart rather than a cross.

It takes courage to love fully, give gracefully and to carry a God who knows you completely.

My Prayer

Lord of all things, sit with me in strife and turmoil, laugh with me in joy and console me when I feel wanting. May the heart of Jesus rest comfortable in the dark and mysterious place that is the centre of my courage. Amen