

Corpus Christi Conference AD 2012
Wednesday Vespers
Varberg, Sweden
Rev. Kurt E. Reinhardt

Text: Ezekiel 36:25-27

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Stone. Stone is hard. Stone is cold. Stone is dead. A heart of stone... that's what God says Israel has... a hard heart... a cold heart... a dead heart.

Stone hearted... they were hard hearted in sin... like Pharaoh... set on their own will... set on their own way... set on their own path... turned against the truth... turned against God.

Stone hearted... they were cold hearted in sin... like Cain... filled with jealousy... filled with hate... filled with murder... turned away from love... turned away from God.

Stone hearted... they were dead hearted in sin... like Adam... dead in their sin... dead in their guilt... dead in their shame... claimed by Satan... claimed by hell.

Why are their hearts as hard as stone... cold as stone... dead as stone? Idols... that's the problem... false gods... stone gods... hard gods... cold gods... dead gods. Gods that demanded their blood... their bodies... their children... gods without mercy... gods without love... gods without forgiveness.

And they defiled themselves... playing the harlot... the prostitute... with these stone gods... who had no mercy... who had no love... who had no forgiveness. They sold themselves to them... sacrificing their blood... their lives... their children... giving their very hearts to them.

Hearts take on the likeness of what they worship. Worship a stone god and your heart turns to stone. If your god is hard... your heart will be hard. If your god is cold... your heart will be cold... if your god is dead... your heart will be dead.

Israel had a living God... a merciful God... a loving God... a forgiving God... a God who heard their cries in Egypt... a God who reached out and delivered them with a mighty hand... a God who overcame every Egyptian idol... a God who tore open the sea... and led them in safety to the Promised Land.

Israel had a living God... who had mercy on them... who loved them... who forgave them... even though they kept failing Him... cheating on Him... betraying Him. Time after time after time... He called out... "Return to me!"... time after time after time... He took them back... He rescued... He saved.

How foolish could they be? How could they leave such a God for hard... cold... lifeless... stone? They seem so silly... so stupid... until we look at our own lives... until we start to see where we too have made such poor choices... where we too have turned from the Living God to follow such hard... cold... dead gods.

We may not remember the moment that we bowed down before an image of stone... when we chose an idol over the Lord... but we can remember when we chose the world's way over the Lord's way... when we thought we were better than others... when we failed to love our enemies... when we coveted the things of the world... when we lost sight of God's love for us... for others.

We may not see the stone idols before us... but we can see the stoniness they create inside us... in the uncleanness of our thoughts... words... deeds. The hardness in here... the coldness in here... the deadness in here... simply mirrors... reflects the idols we have chosen. Our hearts are simply made in the image... they simply look like... the gods that we have turned to... that we have followed... that we have worshipped.

Foolish? Yes. Even stupid. To turn from the living God to hard... cold... dead... stone? Who would do that? Poor miserable sinners... because sin is stupid... truly foolish in all its ways. It began after all with believing that eating a forbidden fruit could make us as wise as God. It began with believing that the creatures could become as great as their Creator. It began with believing that you and I could become our own gods.

But there is good news for poor miserable sinners like you and me in the words of the prophet Ezekiel. God had an answer for the stony hearts of Israel... God had an answer for our stony hearts. Water... clean water... that He would sprinkle on us. Clean water to cleanse... to make clean... to wash away. Clean water that would bring a new heart... a new life... to people like you and me.

It all began in the heart of God... who looked down on creation and saw... who saw what sin had done to His beautiful people... what sin had done to their beautiful hearts. It all began in the heart of God who looked down and saw His people in slavery to the stone gods... weighed down by their heavy stone hearts... hard... cold... dead. It all began in the heart of God who looked down... and wept.

It all began with the tears of God... that sprinkled the earth when they sent His Son down to save us. It carried on with the Son who took up a real human heart... a heart of flesh... so that it might suffer... so that it might be wounded... so that it might die... so that it might be pierced through... to send a shower of God's grace on to the world. As the water poured out with the blood from Jesus wounded side on the cross... the cleansing... the washing began.

A shower of clean water poured out of Jesus onto the world and it fell on us on that special day when we were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. A shower of pure water filled with Jesus' blood... filled with Jesus' life... filled with Jesus' Spirit... gave us a new heart... a new life... a new spirit. Our stone heart was removed and God gave us a new heart of flesh.

God did this all for us... a stone after all cannot make itself alive... a stone cannot come to life on its own. It cannot fill with blood... fill with life... fill with love. Only the Lord and Giver of life can turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh... only the Spirit of the living God can breathe on stone and make it live... only the Holy Spirit can fill a stone with the fire of life.

When we were baptized... the Spirit of God... the Holy Spirit... the Lord and Giver of life... hovered over those waters... as God the Father re-created... re-made... restored us... through His Word... through His Son. The Holy Spirit hovered over the water and He breathed the breath of new life in us as we came up out of that water... He made us alive in Jesus... never to die again.

We now have a heart of flesh... a living heart... a loving heart... a baptismal heart... Jesus' heart... beating inside of us. This heart longs to go the Lord's way... to follow His commandments. This heart longs to worship the true God... and serve Him. This heart is filled with love for the Lord and for our neighbour. This heart knows that there is no other life for it.

The Lord has given us a new heart... a living heart... by His Spirit that dwells within us... but for it to live... for it to thrive... for it to be healthy... it must be fixed on the Lord. And that is the hard part for us... in a world filled with idols... filled with false gods... stone gods... that ever tempt us to turn away once more from the Lord... as Israel did... time and time again.

We can feel the heaviness growing inside... when we fall from our Lord's way... we get weighed down... weary... heavy hearted... our hearts start to feel hard... cold... dead... in our sin... and that is why the Lord calls us again and again to return to our baptism... to go back to the pure waters... the cleansing waters... the Spirit-filled waters... that He continues to pour out on us as His servants... our pastors... in His stead and by His command forgive us all our sins.

There is only one way that your heart of flesh can be kept from growing hard... cold... and dead... beloved... and that is if it is fixed... focused... centered... on your loving... forgiving... wounded God... on the Lord Jesus. And that is exactly what the Holy Spirit is at work in you to do in this moment... and every moment of your lives... He is at work to fix your hearts on Jesus... that you might live out your baptismal life now and forever... with a living... loving... joyful heart. Amen.

Eric R. Andræ, Campus Pastor in Pittsburgh, U.S.A.
Corpus Christi youth conference, Varberg, Sweden
Compline, 25 June 2012
Col. 3:16-17

The Holy Spirit is the shy member of the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is the shy member of the Trinity: He's not even mentioned in our text from Colossians. And yet he is there; he is **here**, he is present – as he always is – in the word of **Christ**; in you, teaching, admonishing.

Why is the Holy Spirit shy?

Because he takes of what is **Christ's** and declares it to **you** – the Holy Spirit is the great preacher, proclaimer, *förkunnaren* of **Jesus**. The Spirit wants Christ to have all the attention. The Holy Ghost points to him [crucifix], he directs your eyes, your thoughts, you being, your **life** to him who **is** your life, even Jesus Christ your Lord.

The Holy Spirit is the one teaching, admonishing. He is the one who – through bread and wine, through **water and word** [font] – causes that Word, **puts** that Word **in you** where it then **dwells richly**; that Word which is of Christ, which is Christ.

This presence the Spirit sustains by the Church's song – "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare you praise" – in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; in prayer, in liturgy, in music: **his** work, his divine service, his godly gifts to you that you – poor in your own spirit but rich in him – may then gift each other with each other. You are God's gifts to each other. Do you comprehend that? The person to you left or right, the people in front of you or behind you here this very evening; some who you know very well, some whom you are just meeting now for the first time: gifts to you from the Lord and giver of life. Gifts. So that you – o temple of the Holy Spirit – so you may teach and admonish **one another**; doing **everything** – whatever your brother or sister may need – **everything** in the name of the Lord Jesus.

This is the Spirit. This is how the Spirit sings. The Spirit – present here now, present at table, present in cabins and dorms, present on the beach, present in the classrooms of Riga, present on the streets of Oslo, present in the offices of Göteborg, present on the campuses of Pittsburgh...present in and through **you**, present and living richly in you by the word of Christ...present in our text indeed.

The Spirit delivers the Word and work [crucifix] of **Christ** to you, uniting you all in act and song, in all thought, word, and deed.

You know, small words carry big weight. We Lutherans know that those little prepositions are important. So, again, listen carefully:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him [crucifix], through him [crucifix], **through him** [crucifix].

Amen.

Corpus Christi Conference AD 2012
Monday Midday prayer (June 25th at 13.30)
Varberg, Sweden
Rev. Jakob Appell
Text: Isa 55:10-11

We have prayed "Come, Holy Spirit" for some time now, and asked the Lord to answer us as we gather for this conference. And he has indeed answered.

The prophet Zechariah speaks of the Spirit of prayer. According to the apostle Paul, it is because of the Spirit that we pray "Abba! Father!" And we *have* prayed. Thanks be to the Holy Spirit. Like children, we cry out with confidence and expectation: Abba! Our Father, who art in heaven!

And Jesus speaks of his Word as Spirit and life. You think, perhaps, that you hear a history lesson when you hear the stories of the Bible. But in addition to history, you face the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and giver of life. No one stands indifferent or neutral to the living voice of Scriptures. Some think they can, but it is only a question of time before they turned down the Spirit. "Today, *if you hear his voice*, do not harden your hearts", says the Lord.

It may be that you have grown tired of hearing or reading the Word. You feel dry and empty. It is like snow on your cold heart – nothing happens, nothing changes, you wait, you feel nothing. But the Word of God has its power. *Eventually. Like* snow falling on cold ground. The earth seems untouched by the water in the form of snow. But after a long winter, even *that* snow melts and waters the earth, bringing forth the fruits. *Come*, Holy Spirit! Through the Word just spoken he has indeed the answered, and he *will* answer throughout the whole conference.

Paul also writes that we are baptized in one Spirit into one body. In Latin, that body is called *Corpus Christi*. And all were made to *drink* of one Spirit, says Paul. The stream that flows from the chalice in the Lord's Supper is *one* stream, a stream that binds us together. Those who drink have something in common. The blood of Christ that cleanses from all sin. We drink, and the Spirit binds together. Come, Holy Spirit! He will answer!

Finally, Paul calls our bodies a temple of the Holy Spirit. He dwells in you, in your body. Comforting, strengthening, cheering, constantly drawing you to your Savior. Come, Holy Spirit! And here YOU are – bringing the Holy Spirit in your bodies, for the benefit of us all. He has indeed answered our prayers.

Corpus Christi Conference AD 2012
Wednesday Midday prayer (June 27th at 12.15)
Varberg, Sweden
Rev. Jakob Appell
Text: Gal 3:26-28

It is amazing to think of yourself clothed in Christ, don't you think? God sees you in a beautiful dress, rather in your own nakedness and sin, or anything that you are ashamed of or dislike. He sees the righteousness of Jesus when he sees you - baptized into Christ, hiding in him.

All of you, who are baptized believers, have something in common. The *one* Holy Spirit, who binds you together. You are all *one* in Christ. You are Corpus Christi. Members of His *one* body. Perhaps an uncomfortable truth! You are bound together with a bunch of people you may or may not like. Some Finns hate Swedes when they play ice hockey against each other. Some Swedes hate Norwegians when Petter Northug opens his mouth. Some Europeans hate Americans because they are... Americans. We think we have our good reasons to not like each other.

You are grouped together in small groups at this conference. You may not like your group. Boring Swedes. Crazy Americans. Childish teenagers. Not very interesting people. Well, get used to it. There is neither Norwegian, nor Latvian, neither teenager, young, old, cool, boring, blond nor black. It is your eternal destiny to be *one* with these people. One in Christ, bound together by the Holy Spirit through baptism.

Perhaps we need to look at this uncomfortable truth from another perspective. Why are you a Christian? Why are all the others around you Christians? Because they, you, I have something that makes us annoying, arrogant, not so easy to love and like. Sin and the darkness of our hearts. *Christ* makes you a Christian, because he is your Savior from sin. In Him, you are righteous, lovely and perfect - and it will be apparent in heaven - unfortunately not before.

It gives perspective. The others are not perfect. You are not. That's why we all look for Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Look around you - a bunch of sick patients looking for Christ, the doctor. Are you with us???

Corpus Christi Conference AD 2012
Wednesday Compline (June 27th at 21.00)
Varberg, Sweden
Rev. Jakob Appell
Text: Rom 6:3-6

Imagine yourself swimming in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. There is no land for you. You *will* drown. Die. There is nothing you can do. Screaming won't help. Not even swimming. Thinking the right thoughts, imagining your rescue, deciding to be saved – it wouldn't help. No works in the world can help you.

Suddenly a ship appears in the horizon. In the midst of your despair, you see your salvation. The first thing visible on the ship is the high mast. It is shaped like a cross. It rises like a mighty fortress. Your heart is filled with joy as soon as you realize that this ship, with that cross-shaped mast, is there for *you*. A lifebuoy will be thrown from the ship – as if it were attached to the very mast of the ship – and thrown around your neck. You would be saved. That buoy would connect you to the ship and that blessed *mast!* You could of course swim away from the buoy around your neck, but who would do such a thing – if he realized that the ship's buoy meant salvation? From that ship, and *on* that ship, he would eventually see land, the shores of *life*.

Holy baptism is that lifebuoy. You were born into this world as if you were swimming in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, drowning and on your way to *eternal* death. No efforts, thoughts or works from you would change your destiny. Only a cross in the horizon, raised on Golgotha two thousand years ago, would change your destiny. Like that ship I mentioned, the cross was meant for *you*.

Do you remember that a soldier opened Jesus side with a spear, and that water and blood flowed out from Jesus on the cross? Water! The water of baptism is the lifebuoy thrown out from the ship with the cross-shaped mast. The Holy Spirit connects you to the ship of salvation, Jesus atoning death on the cross, through Holy Baptism. “All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized *into his death*” we heard. As baptized, you stand on that ship with Jesus, safe and sound, alive and joyful, and stand there awaiting the Promised Land, the shores of *eternal* life.