

Trinity United Methodist Church

January 19, 2020

“Bless This Home: Pure In Heart”

Pastor Dan Elmore

Scripture: Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Sermon

Would you pray with me? Oh Lord, open our ears and our hearts. Let us hear what we need to hear and show us what we need to do to become more faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

A few years ago there was a sort of cleaning/organizing craze that was all the rage. You may have heard about it. It was called the Marie Kondo Method. Some of you are nodding your heads; you remember that. This woman combined practices from Asian culture to help bring simplicity to our lives by getting rid of clutter and disorganization and things like that. And I'll admit I haven't really dug into this method all that much other than what I've heard about it, but one of the central tenets seems to be that you're supposed to keep that which brings you joy. That you, as you go through your clothes, only keep the pieces of clothing that bring you joy. That could be dangerous. *Sweatpants and t-shirts for everybody!* Right? Or you go through your household and clutter around your house. You keep only that which brings you joy. I see spouses looking at each other, eyeing each other like, eh, I don't know about this.

So one of the great things about Facebook is that it pops up with your memories from the past which you've posted on a particular day. So this came to mind because of a day it popped up that I posted last year, a meme of her. If you don't know what a "meme" is, ask a young person. They can tell you. It's a picture with captions on it. So it's got her at the top, and she says, "Ideally, keep only 30 books." Really? And then on the bottom, it shows a picture of a nightstand, and it says, "You mean like on the nightstand, right?" Because that's my life. Now I just have a Kindle. Debbie commented on it last year. She said, "Yeah, that's why I have a Kindle." Because the books don't pile up; they're just all on your device now, and it's fantastic, because my wife doesn't know when I buy more books as quickly any more.

Cokesbury is our United Methodist publishing arm, and they used to do a big display of books at every annual conference, the big church business meeting we go to in Roanoke or Hampton every year, and she used to threaten to put a picture of me beside the register that says, “Do not sell to this man unless his wife approves the purchase.” But it never worked.

If you’re like me, you start one book, you get bored with it, you pick up a second book, another book catches your eye, you pick up the third book. You buy the fourth and the fifth one together that you might read “someday,” and then you go back to the second book for a little while. Then, oh yeah, there’s that first book...okay, I’m still bored with that. And you go back to the fourth and fifth ones and amass more and more and more. Some other title grabs your attention; whatever the case might be. This happens especially if you’re in school or read a lot for work. Ha! I’ve got both.

And then finally around ten years ago, I was officially tested for ADD. People along the way had suggested that I should get tested. “Hey, you might be ADD. It might help clear some things up for you.” Bekah was at a clergy spouse retreat one year learning how to knit or something like that. She and a district superintendent’s wife—they’re like the next level up from me here—got to talking and bemoaning their pastor husbands’ habits, and the woman all of a sudden leapt up, got in front of her and said, “Your husband’s ADD just like mine is. You’ve got to get him tested! It’ll save your marriage!” I didn’t get tested, and we’re still married. Look at that.

But I finally got tested, and one of many signs that you might be ADD is that you stand up in front of a group of people and rant and rave like a madman...no, that you have a huge stack of uncompleted books on your nightstand. Might be a sign; not necessarily *the* sign, but *a* sign that you might be ADD. When you’re ADD you have trouble sticking with something all the way through. You lose interest, you get bored, and/or something new or shiny comes along and distracts you and you start taking off in that direction. Do you remember the dog from the movie *Up*? “Squirrel!” Right? That’s ADD to a “T.” It’s one of the reasons why my doctoral program is taking *much* longer than anticipated and should.

But when people suggested, “You might be ADD,” I always brushed it off, because you think “ADHD,” which is the hyperactive part, and other members in the family have *that*, but I’ve never been very hyperactive and so forth. And I thought, *I don’t have that*. But what I found out was, ADD is also the inability to focus and the inability especially to *stay* focused on something. It often happens when cleaning. And maybe this is your life as well. You start with something like the laundry, and as you’re folding laundry and you’re putting it away, on top of the chest of drawers there’s that book that you’ve been meaning to get around to finishing, so in the middle of putting stuff away, there’s still clothes in the basket; you pick up the book and you start thumbing through it

and you get interested in it again. And you think, “Hmm, I’ll read for just a few minutes, and I’ll go pour myself a cup of coffee while I’m reading.” So you go downstairs and all the mugs are in the dishwasher, so then you start emptying the dishwasher. And then the dog comes out and lets you know that the dog needs to go out, so you go let the dog out, and in the process of letting the dog out you peek in the living room, and the kid has left the TV on. And you go to turn the TV off, but it’s one of those home reno shows and you *have* to see what the final project is going to be like, and are they going to buy it or sell it or whatever the case is. So then finally, two episodes later, the dog has been outside barking for 30 minutes to be let in and the dishwasher is sitting open and half empty, and where did you put that book, and never mind where in the world your phone is. Right? That’s not our house at all, is it, honey? Never.

I asked the doctor, “So how hereditary is this?”, because my wife’s brother is like absent-minded-professor ADD, and he’s Head of Nursing at a hospital over in Gloucester. Scary. I’m never going to that hospital. “So what are the chances of my wife being ADD? He said, “It’s more hereditary than height.” And then he said, “Two ADD people living in the same household. I don’t want to know *what* your house looks like.” But, if that sounds like you, I definitely have a fantastic doctor to recommend to you over in Newport News.

I think a far more common condition that afflicts us all, though, is spiritual ADD. How many times do we say to ourselves, “All right. This time I’m really going to focus on God, from now on.” And then before we know it, we are multiple episodes in on any other show but God’s. And we didn’t mean to. We just got sucked into it.

It’s the second week in our series, *Bless This Home*, when we’re looking at the Beatitudes from Matthew chapter 5. The set of characteristics and traits of people who Jesus said are sure to be blessed by God. Anybody can be blessed by God. Even nonbelievers can be blessed by God. God can bless whoever God chooses to bless. But these are traits and characteristics of people who are pretty much guaranteed to experience blessing from God. We’re looking to apply these to our households, and last week we began with, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” It captures the essence of our theme verse of the year: **“Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will take care of themselves.”** And so by seeking the kingdom, we really hunger and thirst after God’s righteousness.

And today Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Now there’s several different ways to define what it means to be pure. We might think of the refinement of precious metals as they’re heated up until they liquify and the impurities burn off. Or we might think of straining out sediment and waste out of drinking water, things like that. But when it comes to personal purity, one thing has remained the same through all of the ages. Personal purity is highly subjective in the eyes of the world

around us. Things that we might consider pure today certainly wouldn't have been considered as such five, ten years ago and more.

But when Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart," it can also be translated as, "Blessed are those who are *single-minded*." Who have singleness of purpose. Jesus might have been saying, "Blessed are those who are focused on one thing, and one thing only, for they will see God." Of course, that one thing is God Himself.

And if we want our lives and our households to be blessed, that's the question to ask ourselves. Where are our hearts in all this? Where is our focus? The truth of the matter is that when it comes to the heart, we often deceive ourselves with statements like, "Well, our hearts are in the right place." You might even say of people who have got all kinds of bad behavior issues going on, "Oh, but their heart is in the right place." Is it, really? Are *our* hearts really in the right place? We might say of such people, "Oh, but they've got such a good heart," despite all kinds of character flaws.

The Bible tells us in Jeremiah that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart and examine the mind." Paul writes in Ephesians: "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge every kind of impurity." Wow. Sounds like a definition of our world today, doesn't it?

Craig Groeschel of Life.Church says it's like when you walk into a darkened movie theater, which you can do these days. You don't have to show up at the time it says the movie starts, because the movie doesn't start at that time. You can show up a good half hour, 45 minutes later and still make the movie because of all the previews. But if you do that, you walk in and it's a darkened movie theater. And you're stumbling around, you're trying not to trip over people. You're looking at the little lights along the stairs and stuff, and it's hard to see until your eyes adjust to that darkness. And the problem is, far too often, we'd rather let our eyes adjust spiritually than to simply turn on the light.

One of my favorite hymns is "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," written by Charles Wesley, brother to John Wesley, founder of Methodism. And in that hymn he's got a great line, a phrase that says, "take away our *bent* to sinning." I always compare that to when you're driving along and if you take your hand off the steering wheel, the road's straight in front of you. Take your hand off the steering wheel just a little bit and let the car do what it's going to do, and nine times out of ten it'll start to drift one way or the other. And it's ever so slight at first, unless your front-end alignment's just really screwed up. But it's ever so slight at first, but it's that way in our lives spiritually as well.

And we say, “Come on. I don’t drift *all that bad*.” But the thing of it is, you continue to drift, even that very slight drift, sooner or later you’re going to wind up in an accident, if you don’t take control back.

When I was diagnosed as ADD, a big lightbulb went off in my head. “Oh, *that’s* why I am the way I am! I’m *not* lazy!” (Yes, there’s some times I’m lazy, but I’m not *overall* lazy.) “I’m *not* screwed up. I’m *not* deficient. It’s just a wiring issue. There’s some things twisted up up there. That’s why I am the way I am.” And the spiritual diagnosis can be the same as well. “Oh, *that’s* why we are the way we are. *That’s* why we continue to drift and screw up when we are really trying to follow God.”

So how can we regain this purity of heart, this singleness of purpose toward God? Just like there’s practices that help with ADD, there’s practices that help us with our spiritual ADD as well. And the first is to get your own heart right first. So often we Christians, especially when we start getting back on the God wagon again, one of the things we love to do is to point out the flaws of everybody else, right? “Well, at least I’m not *that* bad. At least I’m not as bad as them. *They’re* the ones that really need to get it together.” “Oh, I wish so-and-so was here to hear that sermon today. *They* really need to hear it,” we will often say to ourselves. But we’ve got to get our own heart right first.

Proverbs says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” We need heart surgery sometimes. If you’ve ever had heart surgery, sometimes they can do it the minimally invasive route and go up through an artery with a little camera on the end; it’s fascinating what they can do these days. But sometimes you have to have major open-heart surgery, and they’ve got to crack you wide open, literally, and pull you apart to get to what they need to do to your heart.

Sometimes we just need a little tweak, minimally invasive spiritually. But more often than not, we need to be cracked open, and we need that full-on open heart surgery. And yes, it hurts, but it’s for our benefit. When we do that, we have to get rid of the stuff that is ailing us. To ask ourselves, are we being entertained by sin? Think about what you watch. Think about what you listen to. Think about games that you might play, video games and the like. Think about what you laugh at—jokes that are told around the water cooler, or the things that you automatically repost on Facebook without thinking first. Jokes, especially if they’re at someone else’s expense, especially if they are different from us, ethnically, racially, politically. What thoughts do we rationalize away?

When we used to have regular TV, I’d flip through the channels, and occasionally a little bit later at night come across Comedy Central, and South Park was on. A couple of times I’d try watching it for nostalgia’s sake. I used to watch that show all the time in college, because college, right? Twice I remember trying to watch that show, just thinking, “Oh my. How did I ever laugh at this? Talk about a show that is not pure.” And

you might be thinking, “Come on. We’re Methodists, right? Grace is the word for us as Methodists. We’re all about grace, right? Show some *grace*, man. You’re bordering on legalism.” But think of it more like an addict who is in recovery. An alcoholic swears off alcohol, not to be judgmental towards other people who choose to drink, and not in some legalistic way that all alcohol is bad, but because they know that for themselves, one drop will lead them back down a downward spiral that is incredibly difficult to get out of.

It’s the same way spiritually as well. Maybe we need to Marie Kondo our hearts and get rid of the clutter inside that distracts us from God.

First of all, we need to get our own heart right. And second of all, as we then turn toward others, so often when we parent or we manage or we lead, or whatever the case might be, we focus on the behavior. We want to get our kids to *do what we want them to do*. Right? Or we want to get employees or whoever to do what we want them to do, and so we focus on the behavior instead of the heart. We need to work more towards the heart.

In 1 Samuel when God chooses David, the runt of the litter, literally, to be Israel’s next king, compared to King Saul, who is tall and handsome and everything else, and David’s this little short guy. 1 Samuel says the Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Jesus has always focused on the heart. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, He says, you have heard it said, don’t commit murder. One of the Big Ten, right? But He takes it a step further and he says, “but I say to you, don’t even be angry with each other in your heart, because if you do so you are already killing that person in your heart.” Later on He’s getting after the Pharisees for being a bunch of hypocrites and says, “You’re all worried about keeping the outside of the cup clean, but what about the inside? It’s from the inside from which we drink. Yes, we want the outside to be clean, but we want the inside to be clean even more so.” Right?

One of the biggest mistakes as we help other people is to focus on the outward only, especially if it’s parenting kids in our household. And when we do so, we might get outward submission, but too quickly we can build up inward rebellion. Because right actions come from a right heart.

One of my proudest moments as a parent—I’m doing a no-no; I’m telling a story on my kid in a sermon, but it’s a good story, and she knows that, I hope. Chloe, last year in school, had a friend in her circle group. This girl acted out behaviorally in bad ways because of a really bad home situation. And one day Chloe came home from school and said her head was hurting. We asked why, and she said well, that she was on her way to her desk, she was stepping around somebody else. Chloe stumbled and stumbled into

this girl, apologized, and went on to her desk. It was an accident. The girl thought it was on purpose, evidently, came over to Chloe, grabbed her by the hair from her desk, yanked her by her hair out of her desk and onto the floor. The teacher saw it right away, jumped on it, took care of it, etc., and that was that. A week later, Chloe and I were driving around town and I asked her, "Hey, by the way, how's that situation with that particular girl?" And Chloe said, "Well, the sad thing is that none of my friends really talk to her any more because she's alienated herself from them and us because of her behavior." She said, "But I still try to talk to her, because I know if all of us ignore her, she'll only get worse." *Wow. That was a Thank you, God moment. My prayer always is, Use me, and especially in spite of me. That was an in spite of me answer to prayer there, because that kid, both of our kids, have good hearts.*

So we have to get our own heart right first, focus on the heart of others, and then through it all, we have to lastly pursue perfect purity. Perfect single-mindedness. You say, "Come on, really?" Jesus said be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect, and we are too quick to dismiss the words of our Lord. Why would Jesus tell us to do something if it's impossible? Anything less than purity is impurity.

Ephesians says that among you there must not be even a hint of any kind of impurity or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. After all, how much poison are we going to be okay with ingesting physically or, especially, spiritually?

Craig Groeschel of Life.Church has this illustration I've heard many times of the mom who's critiquing her son's listening habits, the music that he's listening to. It's got a bunch of foul language, it's got a bunch of really foul ideas about people and so forth. And he says, "Oh, come on, mom, it's not all that bad, and it's just a little bit of the bad stuff." And so she says, all right. So she decides to make her son some brownies. And as she's making the brownies, she goes out in the back yard and she picks up just a little bit of dog poop. And then she brings it in and she puts it into the brownie mix and she mixes it all in together, and she bakes the brownies and sits them all nice and attractive on a plate for him. And he comes down the stairs and, "Wow, mom, I smelled those brownies baking, and wow, they look so delicious. Thank you, mom!" He gets ready to take one, and she says, "Oh, well, you're welcome, but...just to let you know, I put *just a little bit* of dog poop in those brownies. I'm sure *a little bit* won't hurt, will it?" It's an extreme illustration, but *a little bit* of poop goes a long way.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." And so what if we've gotten off focus? What if we are impure? What if we've gotten defensive? What if our hearts have gotten hardened? It's still not too late. Ezekiel says, "The Lord says, I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Like I said, when I was diagnosed as ADD, this little lightbulb went off. “Oh, *that’s* why I am the way I am. I’m *not* a bad person.” So many times before people are diagnosed as ADD, they’re actually diagnosed with depression, because of the beating that your mind takes trying to be normal, like everybody else. We can do the same to ourselves spiritually as well, just beating ourselves up about how unworthy we are.

But one of my favorite prayers to pray in all of Scripture is from Psalm 51, the prayer of confession after Nathan confronts David in his adultery and his murder, when David cries out to God and says, “Create in me a pure heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” May that be our prayer every day as we seek pure hearts so that we, too, will see God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.