Let me state, categorically, that purity of heart does not mean sin-less-ness in life. If it did, nobody would ever be pure in heart and nobody would ever see God. We, Christians, are always imperfect beings in the process of recovery. We wrestle every day to reconcile our inside world with our outside world. We can grow and make progress, but none of us ever becomes all that God calls us to be or even all that we could be in this life. Becoming pure in heart is a life-long pursuit.

The Bible speaks about purity – also called holiness – in three different ways. First, there is purity (holiness) that belongs to God alone. In the presence of God, the angels cover their faces, and cry out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:3). They say it three times while hiding their faces, because even though the angels themselves are holy, God is incomparable in purity, and God’s holiness is the source of theirs.

Second, there is the purity (holiness) that will be ours in heaven. John wrote: “When [Jesus] appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). When we’re in the presence of Jesus, there won’t be a trace of sin in us, on us, or around us. We will reflect the purity of Jesus as the moon reflects the light of the sun.

Finally, there is a purity (holiness) that God calls us to pursue now, and of which Jesus speaks in this sixth Beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” We are to seek one thing – purity (holiness) – and in the pursuit, we will see God. The paradox of becoming pure in heart is this: we must have an undivided heart, a heart focused on God and God’s ways, and at the same time we must recognize our human weaknesses and our need for a heart that is forgiven and washed clean.

A pure heart is an undivided heart. When Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” he pronounces a blessing on the person who is single-minded in following him. King David captures this longing for purity when he prayed, “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name” (Ps. 86:11).

The apostle Paul gives us a window into his own pursuit of a pure heart when he writes: “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). Purity of heart is not being perfect, nor is does it lie in what we attain: purity of heart comes from the God we pursue and in how we pursue God. Paul’s “one thing I do” captures the singleness of purpose characteristic of the pure in heart who desire only God.

When we believe in Jesus, faith forms the bond of a living union in which we are “in Christ” and Christ is in us. In that union, two marvelous gifts become ours: forgiveness and cleansing. Forgiveness is ours because God drops all the charges against us and reconciles us so that we are no longer God’s enemies. We will one day enjoy eternal life with God, not because we are without sin, but because God charges our sins to Jesus, in whom our debts are paid in full. This is what Paul means when he says: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

The second gift that belongs to us when we are in Christ is cleansing: God washes our minds, hearts, and lives clean. Forgiveness and cleansing belong together: “If we confess our sins,” says John, “[God] is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Those whom God forgives God also cleanses, and those whom God cleanses God also forgives. Forgiveness and reconciliation are ours because Jesus died and rose again: nothing we do can take away the saving power of his crucifixion and resurrection. But cleansing is an ongoing thing: we never get beyond our need of God’s cleansing in this life.

In this Beatitude, Jesus says that those who pursue the purity God calls them to, those who try each day to live as God commands, they will be rewarded by entering the presence of God. The first step on this walk toward purity is believing that Christ can change us, cleanse us, and create in us a new desire to seek the holy life God offers. This believing in Christ’s power to change us, leads us to confess our sins, identifying the things from which our hearts need to be freed. When we name our shortcomings, and ask God’s help in overcoming them, we take our first tentative steps toward being pure in heart.

We are sustained in this endeavor by God’s Word, looking to Scripture for clues as to how God invites us to live. From Scripture, we find that one way to live as God requires is to worship God. The practice of worship is designed to bring us into the presence of God – or at least give us a glimpse of God’s glory – here and now. Another practice moving us toward purity of heart, is prayer: when we open our hearts to God, we are given unprecedented access to God and God’s unlimited power to help us endure.

Perseverance is critical because no one makes uninterrupted progress on the path to purity of heart. The struggle to live as God commands is a marathon, not a sprint; the power of sin is weakened little by little, and the way to succeed is to stand up and fight and to win more rounds than you lose. We are supported through all this by the knowledge that in Christ we are already forgiven and redeemed, and that we are being transformed into something new and glorious. Throughout this progress, with all its ups and downs, we can anticipate the eventual success of God’s plan for us, of our eventual purity of heart and of seeing God.

Some people have the idea that purity is something that you have when you are young, and you lose it if you mess up. But in the Bible, purity is not something that you lose; it’s something that you achieve as you grow in the Christian life. It’s not something behind you that was lost, but something ahead of you to be pursued and to be attained.

So, we should seek purity (holiness) and be intentional about getting our inside world in order so that we can see God in our outside world. The more we grow in purity (holiness), the more we will see God. We will see God in Scripture and in worship. We will see God in the trials and triumphs of life. We will see God in God’s people and in God’s church. Our seeing will be with the eye of faith, and when Christ comes again to earth, we will see him face-to-face.

Prayer: Holy God, my desire is to have a clean heart before You without the sinful desires, wickedness, bitterness, or anger that keeps me from You. Forgive me for sinning against You with my spirit, my actions, and my words. Help me to retain the joy, happiness, and peace that You offer. God, I cannot do any of this in my own power. My flesh is weak and I can easily become bitter. I can only have a pure heart in Your strength and power. Please grant me the strength, wisdom, and power to turn my life over to You completely. Allow my spirit, actions, and attitudes to reflect You and Your immeasurable grace. In Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

**Go After One Thing**

Sunday, November 5, 2017

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Matthew 5:8

Jesse felt frustrated. Everything seemed to be going wrong. He got a B on his history paper even though he worked extra hard on it and really felt he deserved an A. His Mom nagged him again about putting his clothes away. “What’s the big deal, anyway?” he muttered. “It’s easier to find what I want in the pile than it is to go through my drawers.” To top things off, Dad made brussel sprouts for dinner – disgusting! Jesse stomped off to his room right after dinner, diving under his pillow to escape the sound of his sister practicing her violin.

As he fumed, Jesse remembered a verse from Sunday school: “You are blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.” Jesse hadn’t really understood the idea of an inside world and an outside world before, but something clicked in his thoughts this time. He felt like his world was upside down and inside out today. Yet it was the same world as always. The difference was how he felt: because his inside world felt crummy, his outside world looked crummy, too.

Jesse realized that it was up to him to change his attitude. He decided to notice the good around him and to act in positive ways so that he could put his inside world right and change his outside world. He started by stuffing his clothes into the dresser drawers (hey, Mom never said he had to fold them first!). He shivered at the thought of the brussel sprouts, but he remembered that Dad promised to make spaghetti and meatballs over the weekend. Thinking about the history paper, he had learned a lot about a topic he liked, which was more important than the grade. And as Jesse left his room, he made sure to tell his sister that “Mary Had a Little Lamb” sounded better than it had last night.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Getting our inside world put right is what Jesus means by being pure in heart; and when our inside world is right – when our hearts and minds are clear and focused – then we can see God in our outside world, too.

1. [www.biblewise.com/kids/read/young/have\_a\_pure.php](http://www.biblewise.com/kids/read/young/have_a_pure.php) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)