

Psalm 51:10-17

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are^c a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.

Something had been terribly wrong for a long time, but it all had been covered up, concealed, kept from sight, but never dealt with properly. But one day it all changed. What simmered under the surface underneath a pious veneer was suddenly ripped off for all to see. The ugliness of sin was exposed and boiled over in an emotional display. The terms were piled up, but it still somehow fell short of describing the revolting actions that had taken place. Sins, transgressions, iniquities, were many and they were laid bare in all their shame. And it was idleness had kindled the flame. Wandering eyes led to lust, adultery, and deceit, murder, more lies, a pile of deception. And what was the king's response? David admitted and confessed his guilt to God. *Against you, you only have I sinned. My sins are many in your sight. I have done what is evil in your sight.* Thus, he pleaded to God to have mercy. *According to your great compassion blot out my transgressions and wash away my sin.* Have pity, have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. The confession flowed from a heart of faith who knew that the LORD was just and righteous and by faith David believed also that the LORD was merciful and unfailing in his love. David confessed his sinful actions and he also admitted his natural sinful state. Surely sinful by nature, sinful from conception and birth, and he had fallen short of God's holy standard, not just in words and actions, but in his mind and in his heart. That's where it

started, in the heart, and that heart corrupted by sin infected and affected the mind and the life of David in such a wretched and now obvious way.

Only God could save him. Only God could redeem his soul and cleanse his heart and life. No action David could make would be enough, no recourse he could offer would ever repay the debt he owed, only God in his grace and mercy could make him clean. *Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean, wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.* Here David makes a plea steeped in the picture of the Old Testament sacrifices and New Testament fulfillment. The hyssop plant would be something used when the priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon the people, pointing ahead to the blood of Jesus which purifies us from all sin. Only the blood of Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, could take a sinner so stained by sin and make him spotless and so brilliantly cleansed. And so David in this miserable state pleaded that the LORD would bring healing. Instead of holding on to the guilt that crushed him daily and sin that made a mess of his life and even wracked his body with pain, he confessed his sin to the LORD and looked to God for rescue and peace and even joy! *Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.* And then this is the request David laid before his God of mercy and might, ***“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast Spirit within me.”***

May that be our plea as well. In a world where sin and hatred and deception so often boil over in such obvious ways, we are reminded where this all starts and what simmers under the surface of our own lives. Aware not only of the sin in the world but the sin that dwells in our hearts and emerges in our lives, we plea. ***Create in me a pure heart, O God! Send us your Spirit! Restore to us the joy of salvation! Grant me a willing spirit to sustain me!***

Create in me a pure heart, O God! Send us your Spirit!

What lurks beneath the surface in our lives? What fills that heart of yours?! That is such a critical question because while we can all work hard enough to polish up a pious veneer in the presence of our neighbors, it is clear from Scripture and from our own conscience that we cannot keep our sins hidden from our God. He sees them all, even the ones in under the surface and in our hearts. Scripture makes it clear that we are sinful from birth, sinful from the time our mother conceives us. And the Lord reveals this to us not to bury us in shame, but to make us aware of how dangerous and deadly our hearts can be. By nature, we are impure and enemies of God. We are turned inward and selfish. We are so corrupted by sin and so clogged with impurity that our hearts pump out evil without much effort. Consider the thoughts that pop into your mind without much prompting at all. Sins of lust and coveting, envy, and greed. Sins of hatred and bias, and so many others. Now if we let those thoughts simmer- especially when trapped under a lid of that combustible combination of idleness, anxiety, stress, frustration, and pain - that sounds like a recipe for disaster, doesn't it? And what awful things come busting, flowing, exploding out of the heart, and into our lives. It doesn't take much and what simmers under the

surface, boils over into a shameful mess of sinful words and actions. No wonder Jesus spoke such words of warning concerning the heart in Matthew chapter 15, ***“Are you still so dull? ... the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’*** ¹⁹ ***For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.*** ²⁰ ***These are what make a man ‘unclean’.***

But the sinner prefers to cover that up. The sinner prefers to shift the blame and points the finger. He prefers to call others unclean. She likes to rip others down to feel a bit more righteous in her ways. We have this awful tendency to find any way we can to put others down to lift ourselves up just a bit more, even if it is just in our thinking. But this too is dangerous and unfruitful and cannot take away our impurity and our guilt or provide righteousness that satisfies God. Only a false veneer can be formed. It may fool others, we may even fool ourselves for a while, but it does not fool God.

And so in his mercy, the Spirit of God comes to us through the Word, to expose our sins in the light of his truth. He comes not to finish us off by piling on shame, but he comes also with healing in his wings. When David tried to conceal his sin, cover his guilt, his bones wasted away in regret and under the heavy weight of deceit, but the LORD sent his servant to proclaim a word of repentance, and God changed his heart. His evil deeds were exposed, laid bare, and traced back to an evil heart, but not only did the Spirit convict but in mercy, he converted, made new and turned that heart around. The Spirit took a heart hardened and clogged and oozing out sin, and he broke it open and cleaned it out, with the power of his Word. And thus, from that heart changed by God a new life of faith was restored and David prayed this prayer that remains for us a model and source of repentance.

We too are impure, our hearts infected and corrupted by sin, and so we cry out through the gift of faith, ***“Come, Holy Spirit!” Come create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew and steadfast Spirit within me! Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.***

Restore to me the joy of your salvation!

God had every right to treat us as our sins deserve. He has every right to sentence us to death for our sins and cast us away from his presence, and yet in mercy he calls us his sons and daughters embraces us as forgiven family with his unfailing love. And in his grace, he brings about the change that only he can make. He takes hearts and lives that are spent in rebellion against him and he does not strike us down or even push us around, but with a patient and steady voice he calls out to us to confess our sins and in amazing love he forgives, he redeems, he restores. The Spirit comes through word and sacrament and he barges in and breaks down our stubborn hearts and makes them new. He exposes our sins,

but in his mercy, he leads us to see our Savior, who endured the full justice and wrath of God for our sins. Jesus stood in our place and was condemned to die for the sins of all. This love is so amazing and so divine it is only through the gift of the Spirit that we can even have the faith to believe this goodness of God. Jesus goes willingly as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world. He wins forgiveness for all, even for those that nailed Him to the cross. And the Spirit gives us faith to believe this good news of great joy that is for all people of all nations of all races and tongues.

The Spirit came as promised to the disciples on Pentecost so that they could boldly share that good news with people from all over the world. The Spirit goes out still today so that we can hear in our very own language that we are fully and freely forgiven. Our sins of word and action as well as our sinful desires are far too many to count but has cleansed us from all them. The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sins. What grace and mercy God has shown to each and every one of us! Restore to me, O Lord, the joy of salvation!

And grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

This also is the blessed work of the Spirit that each of us will need. For daily tensions will arise between that old evil heart and the new heart given to us by God. That sinful nature remains in us while we roam this earth faces off with that new heart that God has created and tries to crowd it out and shut it down. Tensions will arise and the old nature will rise up and revolt and hatred and evil and jealousy and envy and all those thoughts and desires will build up once again. It is by the grace of God, therefore, that the Spirit reaches out day after day with his Word and with the blessed touch of the sacraments, so that we are upheld and held steadfast in our lives of faith by his power and his love. He comes to us so that even though our heart still pumps forth evil he produces in us the strength to resist. In his goodness, he gives us a new spirit that is willing to follow the ways of God. As lies and hatred and lust rise up, we give thanks that the Spirit works in us to produce his gifts of truth and peace and love. He gives us self-control and patience and kindness and gentleness and love that mirrors and reflects the love that he has so graciously shown to us!

O Lord, open our lips that we may declare your praise! You save me from my old evil self! Move us to show and teach others of your goodness and grace, your kindness and love, in all that we say and do! Let us praise our Lord with lips that speak from the wellspring of a heart made new. Let us live our lives as those saved and rescued from our sinful selves and made new by the Spirit in the image of Christ our Lord. Come, Holy Spirit! Come and stay and dwell in our hearts and show yourself in our lives for we are daily surrounded by temptation and each day evil arises with us. Come and give us your peace, your strength, and your light!

Come Holy Spirit and create in us a new heart! Restore to us the joy of salvation! And grant us a willing Spirit and uphold and sustain us with your truth and love! Amen.