

September 11, 2011

Sermon Title: "What happened next after the Tin Man received his new heart?"

Text: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 and Matthew 21:28-32

THE LORD GIVES US A NEW HEART, SO THAT WE MAY ENJOY ETERNAL LIFE AND SALVATION

INTRODUCTION

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It's a well-told tale and certainly one of our favorites. A young girl from Kansas is swept away in a twister and transported to a mysterious and magical land – a land full of wonderful sights and sounds, as well as incredible wickedness and terror.

It's a story that was perhaps best told by the 1939 movie that we all know.

Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion take the trip down the yellow brick road and we, along with munchkins, good witches, bad witches, talking trees and flying monkeys, are caught up in the wonder of it all for a little over an hour and a half. And though we know it by heart, all the way from the unsettling black and white twister to the final bright red clicking of the ruby slippers. We know that the Scarecrow longs for a brain, the Lion for courage, the Tin Man for a heart and Dorothy for a trip back to Auntie Em. We know it well, but, all too quickly it seems, it's over. We are standing with the characters by the

balloon, tearfully saying goodbye to our cinematic friends as they float out of the frame and we return to the black and white farmhouse of Kansas.

It's a well-told tale and certainly one of our favorites, and even though true Wizard of Oz fans may have read the further adventures of Dorothy and the others, many of us have not. And we are left wondering. What happened next? What did the Scarecrow do with his new-found wisdom? Just how brave was the Lion, now that he had his courage? And the question for today – what did the Tin Man do with his brand new heart?

The Tin Man's new heart was only a fiction, we know. A heart shaped clock on a white rope. But with the wonders of today's scientists and medical professionals, receiving a new heart is not just fiction. It is a truly amazing gift that we can now perform heart transplants, angioplasties, valve replacements and more. Talk to some patients recovering from heart surgery and they will tell you, "It's like having a new heart!" and often people even feel as if they have a new spirit. They've been given another chance. They have been rescued from a disease that could have killed them.

THE LAW THEN

In our Old Testament reading for today, we see that the Israelites were once again behaving more like the Children of Men, than the Children of God. In fact, their hearts had flat-out turned cold towards God. They are blaming Him for their woes and calling Him ‘unfair.’

In verse 25 of this morning’s reading from Ezekiel we hear that they have been actually been crying, “The way of the Lord is not just.”

At this time in their history, the Israelites were suffering through the Babylonian captivity. They were in exile and no longer had access to their beloved homeland. But instead of turning toward the Heavenly Father for salvation, they were turning against him. They were wallowing in self-pity and instead of taking responsibility for their predicament, they railed against the Lord. They shouted, “Not Fair!” and charged that God was “against them.”

Put in simpler terms, they were feeling sorry for them selves and wallowing in self-pity. And like us today, they began lashing out – even lashing out at God Himself. They were becoming self-righteous and putting the blame on God. Little did they realize that their rebellion was only separating them further and further from God. Their hearts had turned cold, or to put it in terms of the Tin Man, they had become hollow inside.

THE LAW NOW

It is very easy to fall into the same trap ourselves, isn't it? When things don't go quite the way we expect them to, it feels good to pass the pain and misery on to someone else. "I know that the left turn arrow was turning red, but the car in front of me should have gone through it anyway! He shouldn't have stopped! It's his fault I hit him!" I'm sure you can fill in your own stories here. We all have them - stories where we refuse to accept the fact that it's ourselves who've made the mistake and that we deserve whatever the consequences. In fact it goes back to our earliest relatives. Go back to the Garden and look at Genesis 3. Instead of taking full responsibility, the first thing Adam does is pass blame onto someone else. "She gave me the fruit of the tree." He says, not taking responsibility for his own sin of eating the fruit. He knew it was forbidden, but ate anyway.

Pushed down by the weight of our own sin, we seek to drag others down too. In fact, we seek to put them even lower, so that we may feel better about ourselves.

At times we may even sink so low as to put the blame on God. And like the Israelites of old, all this does is separate us further and further from Him and His care.

Like the Tin Man in the story, left uncared for, we become rusted shut - rusted shut in our own self-pity, anger and sinfulness. Like him we are unable to make a move, we are stuck. Our salvation can only come from somewhere else.

THE GOSPEL THEN

The Israelites may have begun to give up on God, but how blessed they were, that God did not give up on them! No, He loved them far too much. They were, after all, His chosen people. Out of this great love, He urged them to depart from the path of self-destruction. In verse 31 He asks His people, “why will you die?” “Why choose a path that will only lead to death?” Through the Prophet Ezekiel He exhorted them instead, to put away their evil deeds because He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone, that’s verse 32.

No, there is another way, a better way. A way that doesn’t separate them from God like sin, self-pity and blaming others does.

It is a way that leads to new life. By casting away the transgressions through repentance and by receiving a new heart and a new spirit by faith.

THE GOSPEL NOW

God promises us that new heart and a new spirit as well! Like the once rusty and unmoving Tin Man, we can now dance with joy. Like the heart patient who receives a new lease on life, there is a new day, a new opportunity.

Instead of remaining rusted shut in sin, self-pity and anger. Instead of blaming God for our problems, we can thank Him for giving us new life, eternal life.

Our new heart and our new life are available to us because of what He did for us. Remember, the Tin Man could make no move on his own, his salvation needed to come from the outside.

Because He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Jesus took all of our sin, yours and mine, all our self-righteousness and all of our self-pity, He took all that to the cross and died for them, so we can be free. So we can have new life!

And this is no fantasy tale or Technicolor movie! We truly do have this new heart and spirit! It was given to us in the waters of Holy Baptism, by the “washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit” as Titus 3:5 says. This new person

in us continues to grow and to thrive, to dance if you will, as it is fed by the Word of the Gospel and by Holy Communion.

This gift of New Life, a new heart and a new spirit has a renewing power in our lives. This means that we no longer have to try and cover our problems, our weakness and our sins with a mask of self-pity and self-deception. This means we no longer have to seek for satisfaction in our lives through anger and putting others down, which only leads to more misery. This means that we have a true and reliable source of life, eternal life, in Christ Jesus.

No longer rusted shut, we no longer need to fear death, it has been conquered. Our free gift of new life and spirit makes it possible to do what Paul exhorts us to do in the Epistle for today; to reflect humbly the mind of Christ. looking to the interest of others.

Imagine the glorious, renewing power in our lives when we can begin to put into practice those things through the new heart and new spirit that God gives to us in Christ Jesus!

CONCLUSION

I can't really answer the question, "What happened next after the Tin Man received his new heart?" because his new heart came out of a silk bag given him by a kindly old wizard, but I can answer "What happens to us after we receive our new heart through Christ Jesus?"

The answer is, "We live a new life!" A new life that fears nothing tht Satan or Flying Monkeys may throw our way. A new life in Jesus - a new life lived in glory to Him who saved us and in joyful service to others, a new life that will not just carry us over some fictional rainbow, but into the eternal celebration of the Lamb in His kingdom.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.