

October 6, 2019

Title: Shared Identity

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Text: Romans 6:1-14

A New Heart!

Heart Transplant:

At 2:00 p.m. on January 5, 1968 a 54 year old man named Mike Kasperak suffered a massive heart attack. He had been suffering from end-stage heart disease, and now he was at death's door.

Just four hours later a 43 year old woman named Virginia Mae White collapsed from a massive brain hemorrhage. By the time she was put on life support she was already brain dead. The next day, a few minutes before noon, her husband Bill got a call from Dr. Norman Shumway. Dr. Shumway was calling to ask Bill for Virginia's heart. 30 minutes later, Bill and his teenaged children gave the okay.

That afternoon Virginia, her heart still beating on life support, was transported by ambulance to Stanford Hospital. Surgery began at 3:30 p.m. Dr. Shumway and his team were about to perform the first heart transplant on an adult in the United States.

A Heart for a Heart:

Surgeons removed Virginia's heart in Operating Room 12 and brought it in a basin filled with cold salt water to Room 13. For a moment, Virginia's and Mike's hearts lay cold and still in separate basins. One heart would never beat again; the other would hopefully come back to life.

The moment of truth came at the end of the 3 ½ hour operation. The doctor gave the transplanted heart a single shock from a defibrillator and blood began to flow into the heart, causing it to 'pink up.' Then the surgical team watched and waited: 10 minutes, 20 minutes. At 25 minutes the heart pulsed and began to beat. Mike had a new lease on life – a life given to him by Virginia White.

A New Heart!

Every one of us suffers from an even more debilitating disease than Mike Kasperak. Our spiritual hearts and minds have been invaded by what Paul calls Sin – a controlling force that enslaves us and inevitably results in death. Just as neither exercise nor a healthier diet could ever have reversed Mike Kasperak’s heart disease, there is nothing that we can do to heal ourselves. We need a new heart.

When he was confronted with the enormity of his sins, King David cried out to God for just that:

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Psalm 51:10 NIV

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

Only God can give us the spiritual heart transplant that we need.

Jesus’ Life/My Life

Baptized into death:

What had to happen if Mike Kasperak was to receive a new heart? There had to be a moment when he gave up his heart – once and for all. At the same time, Virginia’s family had to give up her heart – once and for all. So it was that two hearts lay side by side, as still as death.

Paul says that the same thing is true for us:

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Romans 6:3-4 NIV

Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Being baptized is a picture of dying with Jesus. We give up our old life once and for all, just as He gave up His life for us. When we are baptized we re-enact His death and burial. We say: this is my story, too!

Baptized into Life:

But the story doesn't end at the tomb. Paul reminds us that when we come back up out of the water we are re-enacting Jesus' resurrection and victory over death:

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Romans 6:5-7 NIV

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

When a doctor performs a heart transplant, he removes the patient's diseased heart. It is allowed to die, never to cause the patient problems ever again. So too with our spiritual heart transplant: When we make Jesus' death our death, our old sinful heart and mind are set aside – crucified, in Paul's words. Only then can we be set free from the slavery of sin.

Instead, we welcome God's Holy Spirit to take up residence in us, creating that "pure heart" that David asked God to give him. Now we can begin to live the new life God intended for us all along:

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Romans 6:8-10 NIV

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Shared Identity

Rejection:

It turned out that the biggest obstacle to a heart transplant wasn't the procedure itself. Nor was it the task of finding a donor. The biggest challenge was overcoming the recipient's immune reaction to the donor heart.

In the early days of heart transplants 85% were ultimately unsuccessful. The patient's body never accepted the new heart. It was only when medical science figured out how to overcome the rejection of donor tissue that heart transplants became the long-term miracle they are today. Currently some 5000 are performed each year. On average, patients live for 15 years instead of 15 days. John McCafferty lived 33 years after his 1982 transplant. In his wife's words: "The last 30 years we had together were brilliant. We've traveled the world."

"Dead to sin":

Paul realized that even after our spiritual heart transplant we can fall back into sin's control if we reject the new heart God has given us:

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Romans 6:11-13 NIV

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

Every day, heart transplant recipients remember that they have a new heart. They take the necessary medications to prevent rejection of this precious gift of life. In the same way, Paul tells us to remember, to "reckon" that we died to Sin. Our old life has nothing for us. We must not let Sin set up shop in our thoughts and actions. The temptation to do so will be very real, but we have a new heart – Jesus' own presence – to live a whole new way.

Paul says that we're not to make ourselves a sacrificial offering to the Sin god. Believe me, every day Sin will try to get back in the driver's seat. Sin will want you to be its dying sacrifice. Instead, we are called to be a "living sacrifice": a person who died with Christ and lives through His new life.

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Romans 6:14 NIV

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Shared Identity:

Baptism is the way we celebrate God's gift of new life through Jesus. It presents a picture of our choosing to die with Him, be buried with Him, and raised to new life with Him.

Most of all, it shouts out that our new life is a Shared Identity. The old me is gone; I'm a new person, living in the power of Jesus' resurrection life.

Have you made the decision to let go of your old life and embrace Jesus' new life, like those who are being baptized today?

If you are a follower of Jesus, have you taken your anti-rejection meds today? Is there any area of your life where Sin is setting up shop and the old life is creeping back in with all of its darkness and dysfunction? Are you tempted to be a "dying sacrifice" to the Sin god? If so, it's time to get back on track.

We're God's New Creation. Let's live it.

Shared New Life

Shared Identity

The boat that never sailed: