

**July 19 Theme: Dear God, guard our hearts, open our hearts, and change our hearts to be more like you.**

### **Prayer of Confession and Forgiveness**

ELW #801 Change my heart O God: make it ever true. Change my heart, O God; may I be like you.

You are the potter; I am the clay. Mold me and make me: this is what I pray.

Change my heart, O God; make it ever true. Change my heart, O God; may I be like you.

*Dear God, open our hearts to receive your amazing grace, mercy and forgiveness. Then, use us to be vessels of your grace to all the people we encounter. In your name we pray, Amen.*

### **Call to Worship** Psalm 86:11-17

O God, teach me your way, that I may walk in your truth;

**Give me an undivided heart to revere your name.**

I give thanks to you, O God, with my whole heart, **And I will glorify your name forever.**

For great is your steadfast love toward me...Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

**Turn to me and be gracious to me;** Give your strength to your servant;

**Save the child of your serving girl.** The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*Dear God, ever widen our hearts, ever change our hearts. Make us more like you. Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us. Melt us, Mold us, Fill us, Use us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Amen.*

Today, we will be talking about the heart. We will look at physical and spiritual dimensions of the heart. The physical heart is an organ and a muscle. It pumps blood. In fact, you can actually and literally feel your heart beat right now by taking your pulse. Do you feel that beat? Wow! This is the force of life within you. We need to especially guard our physical hearts during COVID. If we have any type of pre-existing heart condition, or respiratory problem, COVID could be especially dangerous. Dear God, help us guard our hearts!

The word heart is used over 800 times in scripture. The word heart seems to be used to describe how it is with our soul. A hardened heart, a heart of stone, these hearts sound closed. A tender heart, one that is touched and warmed, these hearts are opened. Dear God, teach us to open our hearts. Hearts can be: stone, tender, closed, open, warmed, touched, broken!

Reflect upon your own heart. Has it ever been closed to anyone? Or hardened? A person perhaps that bugs you? A group of people? **We can pray daily, Lord, soften and open my heart toward this person, this group, this issue, etc.** We like ourselves better when our hearts are open and softened, right?

When has your heart been warmed or touched? One time a grandfather was talking with his grandson. The grandson said he knew of a classmate who did not seem to have very much food at home, or even blankets and warm winter clothing. This grandpa's heart was touched and that was many years ago. Now, there are several folks who routinely care for this family. Someone heard of all the financial burdens due to COVID and dropped off cash to the church. She said, "Please, use this for someone during COVID." Her heart was open to the upcoming needs. Someone learned of a homeless person. His heart was touched and realized the person was as hungry for human contact as for food so he took him to the Time Out for breakfast. You have a story when your heart was touched and you were moved to compassion. This sounds like God's Spirit moving, doesn't it?

I want to tell you about Pedro Arrupe's heart. He was born in 1907 and died in 1991. He decided he wanted to be a medical doctor. After three years of med school, his heart was deeply touched by seeing what he described as a miraculous healing. Pedro left school and joined the Jesuits, became entirely committed to serving others. Eventually he was sent to Japan as missionary. On the day the atomic bomb fell, Father Pedro was serving in a Hiroshima suburb. Using his former medical training, he rallied people to help him set up a makeshift hospital. With each person who came ravaged by the bomb, he was clear that he was giving medical care to Jesus himself. "When you see anyone naked, hungry, lonely, a stranger or sick, you are serving me," says Jesus.

Something else happened to Father Pedro while living in Japan. He learned to practice Zen meditation and incorporated this type of mind quieting into his Christian faith. He learned to balance doing with sitting still. It was also probably heart healthy for him to meditate!

Something heart healthy happens when our helping is seen as “I see Christ in you,” and, “The God in me greets the God in you.” We are equal in this journey. “Today I may give you medical care. Tomorrow you may give me an equally meaningful gift. We walk alongside each other humbly, together with God.” Life-giving transformation is much more likely to happen. Something heart unhealthy is more likely to happen when we are doing good deeds FOR someone else. It is a recipe for burn-out if I start seeing that helping is all about me, as the big helper. Even with scoundrels, Christ is in this person. On our own, loving and helping get difficult, but miracles most likely happen, if it is not us, but Christ in us, loving Christ in others.

I will return to Pedro’s heart, but first want to look at this year’s 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Americans with Disability Act. I may have a mental disability you can’t see such as: schizophrenia, depression, anxiety. I may have a physical disability you can’t see such as fibromyalgia. I may have a physical disability you can see. I may be in a wheel chair. I might lose my sight, my ability to see, hear, speak, to name just a few of so many disabilities. In a flash, any one of us could have something happen to us. As followers of Jesus, we are called to see the face of Christ in everyone, and to stand with and walk alongside our brothers and sisters with disabilities. I wonder what would happen if we started to pray, “Dear God, open my eyes and heart to truly see what the town looks like for those who use a wheelchair.” We would start really looking at sidewalks and buildings where there is no access. Jesus calls us to notice.

Jesus says when you are walking along side anyone who has any kind of ailment such as hunger, nakedness, etc. You are walking alongside Jesus. Father Pedro gave medical care to Jesus when he was caring for the Japanese.

We pray, dear God help me walk alongside, especially with those who are lonely, left out, lost, least of these. Right now in the whole world, people of color are telling us that for centuries they have been left out, lonely, last, and the least of these. And still today, statistics after statistics in 2020 tell us that people of color continue to have inequality. COVID affects communities of color in disproportionately higher numbers of deaths, unemployment, poverty, food scarcity, housing insecurity, education disruption, reduced access to healthcare, and increased acts of violence and racism.

Both of our ELCA leaders, Presiding Bishop Eliz Eaton and our local Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson are asking me to bring these inequities to my parishoners, so that we can pray, “Open our hearts.” Why do these disparities continue? God, open my heart to stay with this discomfort, so that I feel discrimination, so that I am tender and open. I’m currently reading a book called “Waking Up White.” In this book, the author is waking up to what life is like when one is born into the majority culture, when our parents raised us with mostly white doctors, nurses and teachers; when text books have mostly white faces.

With classes taught by trained diversity leaders, with diverse students in her classes, and with exercises, this author tells us her journey from ignorance to awareness. She shares that race truly matters a lot in how one sees the world, in one’s ability to get ahead, in one’s confidence level, and on and on.

I will close this message by talking again about Father Pedro’s heart. His leadership came to an end in 1981 when a massive stroke left him paralyzed and mute. In resigning as Father General, he offered this prayer: “More than ever I find myself in the hands of God. This is what I wanted all my life from my youth. But now there is a difference; the initiative is entirely with God. It is indeed a profound experience to know and feel myself so totally in God’s hands.”

All of his years standing in solidarity with the poor, with oppressed, in his case, along with his Zen meditation, he opened his heart so much so that when he lost his ability to speak and move-his words were of gratitude to God. Isn’t this amazing, what happens to us as we live with open hearts. Wow. Amen.

Sing:

**O Christ, Your Heart, Compassionate**

1-O Christ, your **heart**, compassionate, bore every human pain.  
Its beating was the pulse of God; its breadth, God’s vast domain.  
The **heart of God, the heart of Christ** combined in perfect rhyme  
To write God’s love in human deeds, eternity in time.

2-As once you welcomed those cast down and healed the sick the blind  
So may all bruised and broken lives through us your help still find.  
Lord, **join our hearts** with those who weep that none may weep alone,  
And help us bear another's pain as though it were our own.

3-O Christ, **create new hearts** in us that beat in time with yours,  
That joined by faith, **with your great heart**, become love's open doors. We are your body, risen Christ; **our hearts, our hands** we yield  
That through our life and ministry your love may be revealed.

4-O Love that made the distant stars, yet marks the sparrow's fall,  
Whose arms stretched wide upon a cross embrace and bear us all;  
Come, make your church a servant church that walks your servant ways, whose deeds of love rise up to you, a sacrifice of praise!