

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Change of Heart

Old Testament Lesson

Ezekiel 36:22-28 (NRSVUE)

²²Therefore say to the house of Israel: Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them, and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will put my spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. ²⁸Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Bible/Sermon Focus

We are in our second week of a series called, "Changed for Good: Stories of Transformation on the Broadway Stage." Last week we considered that the ideas of "good" and "wicked" are much more nuanced than one might initially consider. And this week we are going a bit deeper with that, looking at ideas we may have about success. What makes someone successful?

In the musical "Mary Poppins" we meet Mr. George Banks, a stern and unhappy man who makes a lot of money. He is successful by all of the standards of the world. But is he? He lacks imagination. He doesn't laugh. He doesn't smile too much. The relationships he pours into are work related and do not bring joy. They lack depth. Who does Mr. Banks have to share life with, really? Who does he have to be vulnerable with and to grow with?

And we also meet a chimney sweep named Bert, who as Pastor Jim pointed, sings the words,

*Now as the ladder
Of life has been strung
You may think a sweep's
On the bottommost rung*

*Though I spends me time
In the ashes and smoke
In this whole wide world
There's no happier bloke*

Bert smiles. Bert dances. He, like his friend Mary Poppins, has a vivid imagination. It is no wonder that the children of our story relate most to Mary Poppins and Bert. They have *heart*.

When we say that someone has *heart*, we mean that they have courage or fortitude, or that they are kind and sympathetic. We use the term in an opposite way as well. For example we could say that when it came to parenting Mr. Banks' *heart* wasn't in it.

This is what the prophet Ezekiel is addressing in the 36th chapter. For a very long time the people of God were participating in empty worship practices, if any at all. The Law of God, the way of life that helped the people uphold their end of the covenant between them and God, was no longer a part of their lives. And their world had fallen to pieces because of it. And Ezekiel is prophesying a time where the people would know God again and repair their end of the covenant, because God would give them new *hearts*.

This is the kind of transformation that being people of faith brings. Mr. Banks has a change of heart by the end of the musical. He is alive and free in a way that he could not have even imagined before Mary Poppins entered his life. He was filled with the transformative power of love in a whole new way. It may not look like success to some, but he certainly seemed like a *happier bloke*.

Discussion Questions

1. Give an example of when you have been able to let go of the world's definition of *success*.
2. How does Mary Poppins impact George Banks in ways that other people were not able to?
3. The trope of overworked, too-busy-for-the family, business person is one that has been used often in our culture. Why is it so easy to lose oneself in this type of busy life?
4. Mary Poppins sings, "*A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.*" What does this phrase mean to you? Do you apply it to any areas of your life or your relationships?
5. How has God given you a new *heart*?

Prayer

God of transformation, your grace re-shapes our understandings and re-orders our priorities. Forgive us for conforming to the ways of this world, for striving for "success" as defined by earthly standards. Help us find contentment in what we have and who we are. Give us new hearts, O Lord, that we may more fully love you and one another. In the name of Jesus and the power of your Spirit, **Amen**.

"There's the whole world at your feet. And who gets to see it but the birds, the stars, and the chimney sweeps."