

“Heart Surgery”

Scripture: **Joel 2:23-32; Acts 2:1-13, 37-42**

Rev. Lewis Galloway

May 24, 2026



Once I participated in a program that invited people in certain professions to gain a better understanding of each other's work. In the morning, we shadowed another professional at work; at the end of the day, everyone met together for dinner and conversation. When the day arrived, I accompanied a cardiac surgeon in the morning and an internist in the afternoon who ran an AIDs Clinic. When I was with the surgeon, I observed heart bypass surgery. I saw the marvelous way in which the human body functions and the way the respiratory and circulatory systems work together. It was a privilege to see the God-given skills of the surgical team that opened the chest, operated the heart-lung machine, harvested veins, monitored the anesthesia, and orchestrated a symphony of other tasks so that the patient could live a new and more abundant life.

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In the Book of Acts, Luke tells us about another kind of heart surgery. It is just as radical, if not more radical, than any heart surgery performed in a hospital. It involves a total change of heart. On the day of Pentecost, Jewish crowds from all over the Roman world gather in Jerusalem to celebrate the giving of the law to Moses. When the Holy Spirit falls upon the gathered disciples, the people crowding the city hear the gospel proclaimed in their own languages. Peter preaches to the stunned crowd and explains what has happened. He preaches the first post-resurrection sermon; he tells how God has raised Jesus from the dead for our forgiveness and salvation. Then, Luke describes the reaction of the crowd with these words: “they were cut to the heart.” They want to know how to live with a new heart.

On Pentecost, this change of heart leads the people to experience three things. First, they repent and are baptized. To repent is not simply a matter

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of uttering a few religious-sounding words and then going on about life as usual. To repent is to change directions – to turn around. It is an about-face. The 19th-century Shakers in America represented the idea of repentance as an actual turning in their worship. As they danced by physically turning, bowing, and bending, they sang:

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

Through repentance, we find ourselves in a right relationship with God. We turn from those things that keep us separated from God and others – greed, lust, selfishness, anger, envy, jealousy, and bitterness. We take hold of those

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things that draw us closer to others – listening, caring, giving, forgiving, and loving.

In our baptism, we die to sin and are made alive in Christ. Our baptism is a lifelong reminder of the new heart that God has given us and the new company we keep. We may continue to do the same work we have always done. Paul was still a tentmaker; Lydia was a businesswoman; and Luke was a physician. But we use our gifts with a new heart, mind, and spirit.

In my former congregation, one of the pastoral residents told me about a young man who came to faith in Jesus Christ through the outreach of the church. He wanted to be baptized and become Christ’s disciple. He was to be baptized at our six o’clock Sunday evening casual service. Most folks

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came to the service wearing jeans, t-shirts, or Indianapolis Colts' jerseys. I wasn't there the evening of his baptism, but the pastoral resident told me that this young man came to church wearing a suit he had purchased just for the occasion. When the pastor asked him why this normally very casually dressed young man was wearing a suit, he said, "Are you kidding? This is the greatest day of my life. I want to be all dressed up so I can remember it forever." His baptism marked the day God turned his life around. I think that if we had baptized folks in the river, he would have jumped in fully clothed.

Secondly, Peter says that the Holy Spirit comes to fill this new heart.

Pentecost is the fulfillment of God's promise through the prophet Joel, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

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your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions”

(Joel 2:28).

I know a young man who dreamed a dream empowered by the Spirit of God. After his junior year in college, George had a summer internship with the World Food Program. His passion was to go to Africa. In Uganda, he saw a stick-built school for AIDs orphans. He asked, “How much does it cost to build a school?” He was told \$30,000. He returned to William and Mary for his senior year and raised \$50,000, enough for the school, uniforms, books, and supplies. The school was built, dedicated, and the government provided the teachers. His dream didn’t stop there. The Spirit led him to connect with other college campuses to raise funds to build schools. Soon, one school became five schools. He was invited to the Clinton Global Initiative, where his efforts in Uganda to build schools were highlighted. His efforts drew

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international attention, and the number of schools increased dramatically.

As of today, Building Tomorrow has constructed 83 schools in Uganda. He didn't stop there. He envisioned hiring recent Ugandan college graduates to become Building Tomorrow Fellows who would each serve for two years, working closely with community leaders to connect rural youth with life-changing educational opportunities. Thus far, there have been 650 fellows. All this because the Spirit filled a young man with a vision for educating the children of Uganda. The Holy Spirit makes such visions possible and leads us to make such dreams a reality.

Are we listening to the Holy Spirit? What dream is the Holy Spirit putting in your life? It may not be as dramatic as building a school in Uganda, but your dream can make an impact on our community, change a life, tutor a

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struggling child, reconcile enemies, heal broken relationships, or bring hope to people in despair.

Without the Holy Spirit, we could not envision a new life or find the resources to live a transformed life. It is not possible by our own strength to let go of those things that are no longer a part of our new life. The Spirit gives us the strength to live in the power of God. When I have struggled to make a change in my life, my first instinct has always been to try harder to be more thoughtful, loving, open-minded, or forgiving. No matter how hard I try, I become disappointed with myself. I have learned that living into the changes God has made in my life is not a matter of trying harder but trusting more. I have learned to pray a simple prayer: “Lord, I can’t do it; but you can in me.”

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Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah after the Israelites returned from exile. His task was to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, but he met with strong resistance and a lack of resources to accomplish the task. He couldn't accomplish his dream. The prophet Zachariah had a vision in which an angel spoke to him and gave him a message for the disheartened governor. The message: *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty.* *“In the power of the Spirit, there is nothing we cannot do.*

Finally, Luke describes the third dimension of a new heart as a common life of worship, prayer, and deep sharing together with other Christians. Luke says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). It is not possible to be a Christian alone. Christ calls us into fellowship with one another. We need each other to learn, to grow, and to be accountable in our spiritual life. God

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speaks to us through others. Sometimes we grow the most by rubbing shoulders with those whose ways of thinking and doing are most different from our own. To grow through our encounters with others, we need to stop pushing our own agendas, quit judging, take a breath, listen, and see Jesus in the other person.

We also grow spiritually through our worship together. We pray together, sing the hymns together, and hear scripture together. When we break bread and drink wine together, we remember God’s goodness and the story of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Our eyes are opened to his presence among us. Our fellowship together is an open fellowship welcoming all.

Dr. Michael Jinkins, the former President of Louisville Presbyterian

Seminary, once reflected on the meaning of Pentecost. He noted that

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New York City is recognized as perhaps the most linguistically diverse spot in the world, with over 800 spoken languages. He wrote that many people react to these differences with a “fortress mentality [trying] to erect walls and dig moats to keep differences out. Not only is this reaction ill-conceived... it runs exactly opposite to the expansive message of the Gospel. In fact, I would propose that a fortress mentality is not an option for those of us who follow Jesus of Nazareth. When the church was born, it emerged in a world almost as diverse as our own. This was the miracle of Pentecost... a miracle of hearing, of comprehension, of listening... And when the church did utter its first words at its birth, they were words that bore witness to the fact that in Jesus Christ God has come into the world to seek out sinners, to forgive us, to redeem us.... the church certainly did not attempt to build walls

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and construct moats to keep out those who are different...” (*Thinking Out Loud, “The Meaning of Pentecost,”* Michael Jenkins blog, 5/22/12, www.lpts.edu). I once heard the governor of the state of Washington State say at a naturalization ceremony that “in Washington state, we don’t build walls, we build bridges”. Pentecost is the day the Holy Spirit builds bridges to unite all in Christ.

Isn’t it interesting that before Pentecost the fearful disciples gathered behind closed doors? After Pentecost, the church in joyful expectation became an open community that welcomed people from all over the Roman world – Jews and Gentiles, Cretans and Arabs. We are a people who have undergone radical heart surgery so that we may live a new life together in the power of the Spirit. Insofar as we are able, we keep the front doors of this sanctuary open during worship as a sign that all are welcome

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to meet Jesus here. This is God’s theater of operation where anyone and everyone, even you and even me, can receive a new heart.