

‘Schism of the Heart’
Rev. Dr. Ann C. Kemper
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based on Isaiah 40:1-11 and Mark 1:1-8

Andy Stanley is a mega-church planter in Atlanta who birthed a church ... and a leadership model ... based on one very simple question: “What breaks your heart?”

Helping people focus their ministry and message on addressing that simple question has encouraged people to find purpose in their relationship with Jesus and fruitfulness in their ministry with world around them. Stanley believes the energy behind addressing solutions to that one question is the impetus to transforming the world.

He also contends until we identify what breaks our hearts our faith has no purpose. Once we find what breaks our hearts ... and we begin to formulate solutions to what causes our broken hearts ... will our lives begin to live the Gospel.

Please pray with me:

God of power and might ... gather us in as we journey through Advent. Not as sojourners on a quest, but as a people aching to be found ... by you searching for us. Fill our broken hearts with your love so we may find energy and purpose in our ministry. Bless us by your Spirit. Amen.

Broken hearts are open hearts. They are hearts no longer hardened by cynicism, greed, or selfishness.

Broken hearts are vulnerable hearts.

How do we break open a hardened heart?

That kind of broken heart, more often than not, requires a schism.

We hear a lot these days about schism.

Schism is a dividing ... a separation of what was once unified but becomes divided. A schism happens at conception ... when an egg divides after being inseminated ... a schism can also happen when old traditions and customs birth new ways of doing things.

Schism is a division within some kind of body that used to be whole in order that a new sense of wholeness can be created.

Schism is typically traumatizing and uprooting ... which is why schism is most often associated with something bad.

We see schism within our nation as we become more and more divided over political ideology and control of government.

We see schism in the great divide between conservative and progressive understandings of God.

As United Methodists we hear a lot about schism within the connection. Differing views on human sexuality has widened the division between a people called Methodist leading many to believe a schism within the body is inevitable. (I’m not so sure.)

But not all schism is bad.

The original Methodist movement inspired a schism! John Wesley, our Methodist founder, believed the Church of England had become too hard hearted and failed to reach

out to the common folk ... especially the poor. Therefore he began a movement that embraced the poor and encouraged people to reconcile their lives to God's heart.

This method of salvation in ministry with the poor fueled schism between the stoic members of the Church of England and common people who gravitated to a faith with a salvation rubric and a realistic embrace of those marginalized by English high society.

Seeing the injustices toward the poor is what broke John Wesley's heart and the socio-economic, religious schism he birthed eventually turned into a good thing. The people called Methodist embraced ministry with the poor and pledged to endorse social justice issues that deprived people of dignity.

Even though we move into a future of uncertainty within The United Methodist Church it is reassuring for us to remember from the very beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, it ushered in the greatest schism of all time.

When John the Baptist began preaching a theme of repentance and forgiveness he began to birth a schism within the Hebrew people. John prophesied a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and the coming of the One who would baptize by fire and the Spirit ... and not by water from a famous Jewish river.

John the Baptist was a schism-maker. He not only dressed differently and ate differently ... he had no political or social or economic allegiance that would call to question his integrity.

This wasn't fake news John the Baptist was announcing! It was John who was the herald who proclaimed the coming of a realm of peace and grace.

This idea of schism continues throughout the entire Gospel of Mark and culminates in the rending of the temple curtain upon Jesus' death on the cross ... symbolizing how God was no longer contained in a gilded box and bound by a law ... but was free to actively seek out those whose broken hearts ached to be filled with God's love.

From then on people would be free to love with impunity and gather together those whose hearts are open to hearing (and living!) the good news message.

To this day, God is forever faithful in that task. God seeks; we are found. God loves; we are encouraged; God forgives; we are saved.

Advent is our time of schism!

We use this time to create a division between that which society and culture dictate to us as the "Christmas spirit" ... holiday cheer ... where lights and sparkly things distract us from what breaks our hearts.

We are lost in a maze of culture and political turmoil. We search for a way out and for understanding to what seems like a crazy world!

Advent is our time of schism of the heart.

If we imagine God as the one searching for us, then I can also imagine we want to be found ... ready ... for when God finds us.

With little less than 15 days to Christmas we have time to find ways to reflect on what breaks our hearts.

The ancient Psalmist says what pleases the Lord is a personal offering of a broken and contrite heart. ... and that kind of sacrifice, or personal offering, requires one to distance oneself from what keeps us hidden or separated from God.

We often associate a broken heart with sadness and pain. But in order for a schism of

the heart to be complete ... our hearts must break.

A broken and contrite heart rends a split between our love for God and our love for secular distractions ... in much the same way the temple curtain was torn in two ... exposing us to God's grace and peace. A spiritual schism of the heart is what we need in Advent ... so that we can be prepared to find peace in the arms of saving grace and our ministry has purpose.

What breaks our hearts? May I offer a suggestion?

Look around ... are your hearts not broken by the absence of children?

What can we do about that?

This Saturday is the Christmas Craft Workshop. Bring a child ... or two of three ... to the Workshop! Invite your neighbors and their children. Bring your grandchildren!

Imagine what can be done if we mend our broken hearts by intentionally bringing children to church.

In that way ... we will be found not only ready, but the small will be made great; the common will be made holy; the less than perfect will be made beautiful; and our chronic self interest will be transformed by love.

I cannot think of a better schism of the heart than that!

Thanks be to God! Amen.