

Hear the words of David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel:

**“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are...
a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”**

What strange words!

God wants “BROKEN HEARTS”? What shall we make of that?

We all know, of course, what a BROKEN HEART is.
Most of us have had one.

A BROKEN HEART means sadness, hurt, bitter disappointment.
Especially in romance.

You were in LOVE... with the handsomest boy,
the prettiest girl you’d ever seen.

You hoped and dreamed and waited.

But your love wasn’t returned.
That person loved SOMEONE ELSE, and you were left alone
with your tears and your broken heart.

Remember?

Actually, it could be worse than that.

Imagine that you did get to marry that wonderful person.
You started life together... there was a wedding day... a honeymoon...
that first “love nest”... and a bouncing baby.

And then?

Then something that never entered your darkest dream.
A betrayal of that love...
a dark day of deception, adultery, hateful words,
and a bitter parting of the ways.

DIVORCE.

The death of your marriage.

And a BROKEN HEART more devastating than any teen-aged grief.

And not just your heart!

That broken marriage left the children with broken hearts too.

“Mommy, why isn’t Daddy coming home?”

Some of you survived with a marriage intact,
only to have your CHILDREN break your heart when they grew up...
and grew vulgar and hateful toward you
or turned to drinking or drugs
or disappeared completely from your life.

“My son hasn’t called me or written me in years,” one mother told me tearfully.

“I don’t even know where he is...or if he’s alive.”

A BROKEN HEART is a great big part of the damage
left behind by human sin.

All of us here in church this morning know about broken hearts
because all of us are SINNERS.

But what we might easily forget
is that we are not alone in this grief.

GOD HAS A BROKEN HEART TOO!

The Bible says repeatedly that God is Not some “faceless Force” ...
not a celestial Machine devoid of feeling.

Rather He is a “Father.”

His nature is “Love.”

We are His “children.”

He yearns for us, takes delight in us.

And it is just because He loves us so
that every human SIN wounds His great heart – grieves Him!

Already in Noah’s time, when the earth was steeped in violence,
the Bible tells us,

**“The Lord was sorry that He had made man...
and it grieved Him to His heart.”**

Later after God had called the Israelites to be His own specially chosen people, they rebelled and turned their backs on Him.

“I took them in my arms,” God told the prophet Hosea,
“but the more I called them, the more they went away from me.”

So grieved was God that He did something drastic.
He ordered the prophet to marry a PROSTITUTE who ran away from him.

Then He explained to Hosea,

“That’s how it feels to me!

I am a faithful husband who has been abandoned.”

A BROKEN HEART?

God knows about that first-hand!

In fact, you and I have been part of His heartbreak.

Every time we lie or complain,
every time we neglect our duty, betray one another, or
stab one another in the back,
we are stabbing Him too!

But that’s where we part company.

For a BROKEN HEART prompts a very different reaction in God than it does in us.

When MY heart is broken,
my impulse is to react with pride, anger, or even hatred.

It’s as if I had two hearts –
a soft outer one easily bruised and broken
and a tough, stubborn inner one that wants to HURT the one who HURT ME.

That stubborn heart says, “You have wounded me!
Now I’m going to wound you too!”

Often that’s the story line in the evening news.

**THE PEACE OF THIS QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD
WAS SHATTERED EARLY THIS MORNING
WHEN AN ESTRANGED HUSBAND SHOT HIS WIFE AND THEIR
TWO CHILDREN, THEN TURNED THE GUN ON HIMSELF.**

That's a common human reaction to heartbreak.

Curses and threats.

Rage and restraining orders.

Lawsuits and gunfire!

Not so with God!

When God's heart is **BROKEN**, He reacts... not with hatred or pride,
but with more **LOVE**!

The Bible record echoes with the theme
of God returning **GOOD** for human **EVIL**.

Judges who rescued the rebels.

Prophets who warned, then comforted them.

And finally His own dear Son.

JESUS CHRIST came into the world with the great heart of God
beating in His breast.

He felt what the Father felt, said what the Father said:

**“Oh, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you,
but you would not!”**

He wept broken-hearted tears.

And finally He went all the way to “Heartbreak Hill,”
there to make a sacrifice for sin.

God paid the debt His servants owed Him!

Ten days from today begins the season of **LENT**.

We will make the trip to Mount Calvary, the place where we see most clearly
the **BROKEN-HEARTED LOVE OF GOD**.

I hold His love before you this morning. Will you let it move you?

In a certain 19th-century English novel
the story is told of a little boy named Bron
who goes to church with his governess.

It is his very first time to go.

He hears the pastor tell a story of a kind and good man named Jesus who is betrayed, arrested, slapped, and spit on, and finally crucified as people in the crowd mock him.

It is more than Bron can bear, and he begins to cry.
“Stop crying, Bron,” says the governess, “or people will think you are strange.”

No, governess!

It is not little Bron who is the strange one.
It is YOU! ... and all who sit in churches unmoved, unchanged by the story of Jesus.

For it is a story that ought to **BREAK OUR HEARTS...**
that is, those proud, sinful stubborn hearts that we have hardened over the years.

And that’s what this Psalm asks us this morning:
when all is said and done, **WHAT IS IT THAT GOD REALLY WANTS?**

Here is how the Psalm answers:
**“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
a broken and a contrite heart”**

What God most wants
is that we undergo an inner transformation – have a “change of heart.”

If there is to be **SADNESS**, let it be a sadness over our **SINS**.

“Contrite” means “sorry,” willing to change my ways.

I have seen such hearts over the years. Haven’t you?

Prodigal children who finally came back home,
Drunks who got sober,
Adulterers who returned to their marriages and lived faithful from then on,
Angry people who finally forgave each other, often with tears...
all because of Jesus and His love.

Betty and Wilma were two old women who had conducted a long-time feud that became known in the whole congregation I served in Sequim, WA.

They came to church, but did not speak.
They came to Holy Communion, but would not look at one another.

In time, I became aware of it.
Visiting each one, I asked if what I had heard was true.
“It is,” they admitted separately, in voices both sheepish and stubborn.

“Very well,” I told them.
“Before you come again to the Communion table, we need to meet
and settle this matter.”

They agreed. Later that week, they and I sat in three chairs before the chancel
and recited the story of how this enmity had begun, and how it had
hardened over the years.

I read God’s Word to them. Admonished them. Directed them to apologize
to one another.

And they did. Right there in front of the altar where they had so
heedlessly communed...
both in turn spoke a sincere “I’m sorry.”

Then came a moment I did not expect.
TEARS from both. And a lingering embrace.

Proud hearts that broke like eggshells
to LET GO of old bitterness
and the LET IN the healing grace of God’s forgiveness!

And then the next Sunday, the two knelt side by side to have the sacrament
and hear the words, “**This is my body, broken for you**”

A miracle, I thought!

What happened to them is offered to you again today... the promise of God spoken
in another Psalm: “**He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.**”

Lent is coming, and after it, that wonderful Easter Day.

May the old, sweet story of Jesus
BREAK OUR PROUD HEARTS and let the JOY RUSH IN!