

Ezekiel 36. 22-28

Follow the Yellow Brick Road

Perhaps you're old enough to remember the classic movie *The Wizard of Oz*, it tells the story of Dorothy a young girl from rural Kansas who finds herself in the land of Oz, thanks to a tornado. After a nasty encounter with a witch, Dorothy feels quite unwelcomed and longs to go back home, but the only one who can help her get home is the Wizard of Oz, who resides in the Emerald City. The Munchkins of Munchkin Land inform Dorothy that she'll get to Emerald City as long as she follows the yellow brick road.

On her travels along the yellow brick road, she meets three people who also need to see the Wizard of Oz for various needs. One of these men, the second, is the tin man. The tin man tells Dorothy that he was made without a heart, and he needs a heart.

At first, we assume the tin man is talking about a literal heart, but when the tin man sings his song, "If I only had a heart," it is then we realize he wishes he could be "tender and gentle, and awfully sentimental," he could, "register emotion", and he could be "kind of human," if he only had a heart. He doesn't want a brain because that wouldn't bring him happiness – but with a heart he might once again love and be loved.

The Bible has numerous things to say about the human heart. In today's passage Ezekiel speaks about the human heart and spirit being made new. The heart of stone refers to Israel's stubborn rejection of God and their pride and self-reliance in life. They were under the Law but consistently broke the Laws of God; in other words, their hearts were no longer obedient, passionate or tender towards God. Ezekiel writes:

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A 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. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. (verses 25-28)

God will remove their hardness of heart and give them a new heart – a new spirit of holiness.

There is something appealing about the new. A new baby or grandchild. A new house or car or job. A new friendship or partnership. A new heart and new spirit that will sustain us in working to bring about new ways of living, a new world, a new kingdom, God's kingdom.

But there are also times when something new becomes used, gets a bit old and worn out. We find ourselves not quite as excited as we once were. This is when we

invest the time to whatever is getting old. We renovate the house, clean the car and make time to strengthen ties with our family and friends.

The same can be true of our faith and journey with God. Sometimes, due to the daily routine of life we too need a new heart and a renewed spirit, this can be especially true at this time of lockdown and self-isolation. We need to reach out to God with renewed vigour through our prayers and the reading of scripture. One passage I return to again and again is from Ephesians, it's the reading I chose for my induction at St Michael's and All Angels. Just imagine for a moment St Paul sitting you down and offering you this prayer:

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3: 16-19

It's a prayer to strengthen our hearts so that we may know afresh what it is to love, and be loved with all the fullness of God.

Every blessing, Linda