

“The Heart That Grew Three Sizes: From Stone to Flesh”
Ezekiel 36:26

As we ponder the power of love in community to bring about transformation this Advent season, it is impossible to ignore the urgent need for this healing in our world. Just this past month, a high school in California witnessed a terrifying display of hate when students formed a human swastika. Across the ocean, we saw the horrific mass shooting in Sydney, Australia, targeting innocents.

Into this world—a world where hate, violence, and fear so often define our headlines—God comes to us. God comes to heal us and to call us to share that same power of healing with others. The love we ponder during this Advent season is not simply a cozy feeling; it is the **only power** in the universe capable of transforming our core wounds and healing the deep divisions of our society. Our work together is just as needed today as it was two thousand years ago at the birth of Christ.

People of faith have longed for this inner transformation through the ages. One of the most beautiful and powerful prayers in the Bible comes from a place of deep repentance and desire for restoration: **Psalm 51:10**, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*” This expresses the universal desire to be healed and transformed from the inside out.

And this desire for a spiritual heart transplant is exactly what the prophet Ezekiel addressed to an exiled and heartbroken people. From today’s scripture reading, we hear God’s incredible vision for a new reality:

Ezekiel 36:26: “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.”

This was an incredible, almost unbelievable gift of hope for the people of Israel. They were at the absolute lowest point in their history. The powerful Babylonian Empire had decimated their land, destroyed Jerusalem and their sacred Temple, and exiled most of the people. Everything seemed lost. Hope was the last thing on their minds.

Here is a clip from the Bible Project about the prophecy of Ezekiel: [Book of Ezekiel Summary | Watch an Overview Video \(Part 2\)](#)

Ezekiel knew that the healing required for national restoration had to start with the **heart**. He understood that laws, rules, and mere behavior modification would only take them so far. Something more fundamental had to change.

Much like the Grinch in Dr. Seuss’s book, the healing transformation needed to go deep to the root cause of the problem. The Grinch’s heart was famously “two sizes too small.”

God's promise is that the **heart of stone** needs to be replaced with a **heart of flesh**. The heart that was shrunken by fear and isolation needs to be transformed so that it can grow **three sizes**. Nothing was going to truly change until the root of the problem—the heart—was transformed.

Fearful hearts will always lead us to constricted, defensive lives, no matter how good our intentions might be. This is where the wisdom of spiritual masters intersects with the story of the Grinch.

In his book, *Invitation to Love*, Fr. Thomas Keating speaks of three heart-constricting core wounds connected to our basic human needs for survival: **Safety, Affection, and Power**. These are the very areas where we get wounded, leading our hearts to shrink.

When our fundamental needs for **security, affection/esteem**, and **control** are unmet, our hearts become fearful. Any trigger that impacts these core wounds is seen as a direct threat to our survival. And so, we live on alert, constantly seeking more safety, more validation, and more control.

That is exactly what happened to the Grinch. He wanted to control what he hated. He stole from others what he perceived to be a threat to his personal peace. Our world and our personal lives are filled with such desperate and futile attempts to manage our core wounds.

But the answer does not lie in trying harder to fill those three chasms. The answer lies in the **change of heart** that can only come from Divine love.

Lisa Colon Delay, in her book *The Wild Land Within*, suggests this spiritual practice for self-examination. I invite you to pray with these wounds this week:

- **The Chasm of Safety:** In what ways in your early childhood did you feel unsafe or fearful? What did the little child in you feel like while being powerless and afraid?
- **The Chasm of Affection:** In what ways did you long for appreciation, belonging, or unconditional love in your childhood and adolescence?
- **The Chasm of Power:** In what ways have you felt powerless in your life? In what ways do you try to maintain power and control over your life now?

If you feel comfortable, offer this prayer as you explore this difficult inner terrain:

God, I am noticing my inner self and my body in new ways as I recall pain and things from long ago. Soothe me with your Spirit and give me the courage to feel what I cut off from myself to survive during difficult times so I might move toward wholeness. Thank you for calling me into a deeper kind of life. I commit my whole self to you.

Another critical thing to keep in mind is that **God's grace comes to us even when we are not ready.**

The Grinch did everything in his power to keep God's grace out of his life. Yet, one simple song—one act of selfless love and joy from the Whos—got to him! It came when he was at his worst! With all of his Grinchy spirit of meanness, love found a way into his heart.

The same is true of us. When Jesus came into the world, people were not expecting this kind of love. No one expected the Almighty God to come into the world as a simple poor baby to ordinary people in an unimportant town. No one expected love to confront hatred and fear by being crucified on a cross.

But that is the **way of transformation**. Sooner or later, God's persistent love finds us, and all of our defenses, no matter how strong they are, melt away. Our **hearts of stone** are replaced with **hearts of flesh**.

So embrace the humble things of this season: the songs, the unexpected acts of kindness, the prayers, the lights, the candles, and even the struggles of life. For you never know how love will enter your life again and will transform your heart to grow three sizes!

Amen.