

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

March 22, 2015

*“God Gave You A Clean Heart”*



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
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## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

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***Live Life Fully Alive!***

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

*The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the LORD’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*

**Psalm 51:10-12**

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

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“God Gave You A Clean Heart”

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A minister told his congregation, “Next week I plan to preach about the sin of lying. To help you understand my sermon, I want you all to read the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 17.” The following Sunday, as he prepared to deliver his sermon, the minister asked for a show of hands. He wanted to know how many had read the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 17. Every hand went up. The minister smiled and said, “Mark has only sixteen chapters. I will now proceed with my sermon on the sin of lying.”

God gave you a clean heart. That’s what I want to talk with you about today. God gave you a clean heart. A clean heart is full of forgiveness. A clean heart is full of love. A clean heart is full of joy. God gave you a clean heart. A clean heart is full of faith. A clean heart is full of hope. A clean heart is full of peace. God

gave you a clean heart. A clean heart is full of compassion. A clean heart is full of justice. A clean heart is full of liberty. God gave you a clean heart. (Say to those around you: God gave you a clean heart. God gave you a clean heart. God gave you a clean heart.)

Nelson Mandela got out of prison in South Africa in 1990. Back then on Sunday mornings, I had gotten away from the church. I attended the church of Charles Kuralt. "It's 'Sunday Morning' on CBS and here again is Charles Kuralt." Charles Kuralt carried Nelson Mandela's release from prison live. Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in a South African prison, put there by a racist, Apartheid regime. Nelson Mandela, while in prison, became an expert on forgiveness. Nelson Mandela said, "If you hate your enemy, it's like drinking poison and expecting your enemy to die." Prison changed Nelson Mandela, from being rightfully hateful of Apartheid, to being forgiving of those who practiced Apartheid. He was still determined to get rid of Apartheid, which he did. You could say, God gave Nelson Mandela a clean heart. A heart filled with compassion and justice. And God gave you a clean heart. I believe that, because the Bible tells me so.

Psalm 51, scholars say, is the greatest forgiveness Psalm of the church. Some believe it was written as a result of David's remorseful feelings over his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, not to mention setting up her husband Uriah to be killed in battle. Psalm 51 can be taken as a prayer, as all the Psalms can be, and in Psalm 51, David prays to God to make him into a new man. Psalm 51 prays to God, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." Psalm 51 prays to God, "do not take your holy spirit from me." Psalm 51 prays to God, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." How many of us have made mistakes, perhaps terrible mistakes, and have prayed to God to make us into a new person, to create in us a clean heart? I believe God answers such prayers. And I believe God gave you a clean heart.

Jeremiah 31, which describes a new covenant between God and Israel, is often believed by some Christians to be God's new covenant with Christians. Jeremiah 31, I believe, is God's new covenant with everyone. Jeremiah 31 essentially says God gave

us the clean heart that David prayed for in Psalm 51. And God gave us a lot more than that. God says: The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with you and here it is. God says: From now on I will write the knowledge of me on your heart; nobody has to teach you about me anymore; you will know me because I am inside of each one of you. God says: Nobody has to tell you to seek my forgiveness, I have written my forgiveness on your heart. God doesn't leave anything up to us. God knows we're only human. So God doesn't leave it up to us to decide to accept God's ways into our hearts. God writes God's ways into our hearts! God doesn't leave it up to us to know God. God writes the knowledge of God into our hearts! God doesn't leave it up to us to seek forgiveness from God. God writes forgiveness into our hearts! So God gave us a clean heart. And God gave you a clean heart.

"Create In Me A Clean Heart" is a relatively new Christian hymn. We sang it during daily Chapel at seminary quite frequently. "Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a right spirit within me." I attended almost every chapel service while I was there, probably more than my fellow students (who were smart and were off studying), because I knew I needed to be in chapel a lot more than my fellow students. Even though they were much younger than I was, I was a relatively young Christian. So I knew I needed a clean heart - a good heart - a lot more than they did. Of course, good is in each one of our hearts, right alongside evil. Free will means we can choose between good and evil, because, thanks to Adam and Eve, we have the knowledge of good and evil. When we choose the good, we know we have a clean heart, because God gave us a clean heart. And God gave you a clean heart.

A San Francisco church doesn't seem to realize that God gave them a clean heart. When homeless people sleep in the church's doorways at night, a sprinkler system is set up to douse the homeless with water. It's to keep the homeless out. It's disgusting. I thought: How could any church do something like that? Then I remembered: When I came to this church 6 months ago, there were "No Trespassing" signs in our Peace Garden and elsewhere on our property. And the police had a standing order to run the homeless off at night. I knew this church was better

than that. So after getting approval from church leaders, I contacted the police and said: that order no longer stands. Then I tore down the “No Trespassing” signs. (I keep one in my office just for kicks.) Then I put up a sign in our front yard: Peace Garden Open For Prayer 24/7. And I told our staff and others, if it looks like homeless people are sleeping in our Peace Garden at 3 AM, we’re to assume they’re meditating or praying. Also, we now have 6 homeless people living inside our church. This church now realizes that God gave us a clean heart. And God gave you a clean heart.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the PCUSA, now realizes that God gave them a clean heart. The PCUSA voted last week to recognize marriage equality. Clergy friends of mine in the PCUSA are ecstatic. Of course, the decision comes after dozens of states now allow same-sex weddings, and a couple months before the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to make gay marriage legal across the country. Still, it was a struggle for the PCUSA. Ten years ago this summer, the United Church of Christ, the denomination we’re affiliated with, recognized marriage equality. The UCC was the first mainline Christian church to do that. And it was back in 1972 that the UCC ordained its first openly-gay minister. The UCC was the first mainline Christian church to do that, too. The UCC and the PCUSA both realize that God gave them a clean heart. A heart filled with compassion, justice, and love. And God gave you a clean heart.

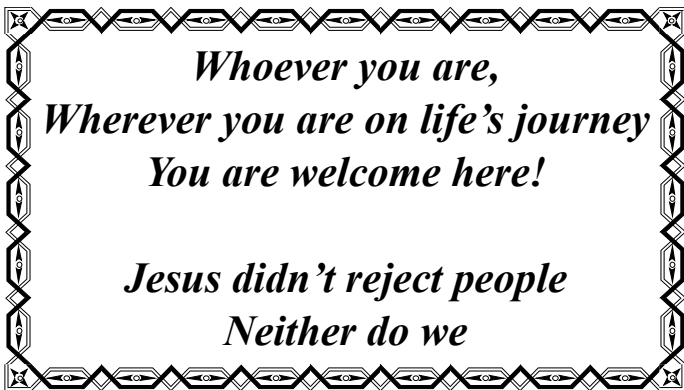
One year ago today, at my church back in Michigan, I performed 48 same-sex weddings. One year ago today. It came a day after a federal judge in Detroit declared Michigan’s same-sex wedding ban unconstitutional. I know some people have a problem with same-sex weddings. They say it’s against the Bible. But the Bible says, “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” And I saw so much love that day. One couple had waited 37 years to get married. And I was honored to do their wedding. And while it’s true that I didn’t marry Adam and Steve, I did marry Adam and Gordon. One guy whose wedding I performed told me he hadn’t attended church in 30 years. But now, because of what I did for him, he was going to start attending church again. That day, I believe those 48

couples realized that God gave them a clean heart. And that day I realized that God gave me a clean heart, too. And I have no doubt that God gave you a clean heart.

A bumper sticker that I saw last week said: Self-reliant Americans on board. Self-reliant Americans on board. At first I thought: Great. So you have your own military that keeps foreign armies from attacking. You have your own Weather Bureau that tells you when a storm is coming. You have your own roads that you drive on. Then I thought: Maybe the people with that bumper sticker need to remember the words of President Obama. "You didn't build that." And then I thought: Those people should have a more truthful bumper sticker that says: Government-dependent Americans on board. But then I had a more spiritual thought (which is why I'm telling this story in church): Wait a minute. Did you create the earth that you're driving on? Did you create the air that you breathe? Did you create yourself? So really that bumper sticker should be: God-dependent Americans on board. After all, they didn't give themselves a clean heart. God gave them a clean heart. And God gave you a clean heart. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." So Jeremiah 31 gives new meaning to Jesus' words, doesn't it? You don't have to accept God into your heart. You can. But whether you do or not, God is already there. God has written God's ways on your heart. God has written the knowledge of God on your heart. God has written forgiveness on your heart. So, Jesus was right (of course, because he's Jesus). "The kingdom of God is within you," because: God gave you a clean heart.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to know that you gave us a clean heart.  
Help us to know that you are written on our heart.  
And help us to know that you are written  
on everyone's heart.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*



***Whoever you are,  
Wherever you are on life's journey  
You are welcome here!***

***Jesus didn't reject people  
Neither do we***

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism