

Have a heart

Heather Smith *reflects on* Ezekiel 36:24-28

The first heart transplant was carried out by Dr Christiaan Barnard in 1967 in Cape Town, a huge step in medical history. While they're not exactly routine, as many as two hundred heart transplants take place in the UK every year. You may be a candidate if you have severe heart failure – that is, your heart is unable to keep up with the demands on it because it cannot pump blood with normal efficiency.

It can certainly be difficult to keep up with the demands that life places on our hearts. Perhaps you have too much to cope with in family life, or suffer from loneliness. Maybe you find it hard to know where to channel your compassionate energies – so many people need our help. Perhaps you struggle with issues from your past.

The solution to all our heart problems, according to Ezekiel, is that God will take out our hearts of stone and replace them with hearts of flesh. "Ah," you might say, "If only my heart were harder I wouldn't suffer so much." If you receive a surgical heart transplant things are never quite the same. It might save your life, but you need to take some precautions, including taking immunosuppressants for the rest of your life. If you receive a heart transplant from God, says Ezekiel, it comes with a new spirit. The combination, far from making us less able to cope, may be the key to Christ-like compassion. 🌸



Lord God, put a new heart within me, and direct my energy and my compassion in your ways. Amen.

Books of the Old Testament Zephaniah

by Georgina Byrne

There's a glimmer of joy in Zephaniah, but to get there the reader must wade through a torrent of disaster. This fits with the great message of the book – that the unrelenting horror of divine judgement will, ultimately, purify and refine those who are left.

The prophet is named in the first verse as a descendent of Hezekiah, the righteous and respected king of Judah (2 Kings 18). His words

point to the coming devastation of the fall of Judah to the Babylonian Empire. "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. The prophet uses vivid language to describe the destruction. The reason for it becomes clear in chapter three. The city has not listened to the Lord and officials are corrupt. Those who remain will be those who are faithful and lowly. Only over these will God cast protection, restoring their fortunes. When the time of purification is over, the remnant will remain. 🌸

LGBTQ+ Church

Part 4 – safeguarding

by Jayne Ozanne

Why do LGBTQ+ people need safeguarding in religious settings? Sadly, because many have been subjected to a range of conversion practices that try to change or suppress their innate sexuality or gender identity, causing significant harm. Research has shown that this is practised by many religious groups, where mainly young LGBTQ+ people are told that who they are is unacceptable to God and to their communities. This can cause untold mental health problems, as well as

deep feelings of shame and self-loathing that can cause life-long trauma.

That is why the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBTQ+ Lives chose to focus its second global conference, held at the Foreign Office in March 2022, on agreeing a set of Principles to Safeguard LGBTQ+ lives. These were based on the six principles enshrined in the UK Care Act (2014) – empowerment, prevention, proportionality, protection, partnership and accountability. The full text is available at www.globalinterfaith.lgbt 🌸

“Prayer strikes the winning blow; service is simply picking up the pieces.”

S. D. Gordon (1859-1936), author and evangelical lay minister