

HEARTBEATS-Staying Connected 4-12-21



Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, April 12, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for God's creation. Pray for health for the plants and animals of the world, especially those that are endangered. Ask for God's wisdom and guidance for how we should best utilize and care for creation. Pray that the resources of the world be distributed in ways that are beneficial for all.

A good way to read the Bible is from the perspective of restoration of relationships. God very much desires to be in relationship with us and for us to have healthy relationships with each other. Toward that end, God works to bring about the restoration of broken relationships so that we can be connected to each other. We see this often in the gospels where Jesus brings about healing that returns people who have been separated from family or community.

One way this happens is when the dead are raised and reunited with their family. The young daughter of Jairus (Mark 5) is raised and given back to her parents. In

Luke 7, Jesus and the disciples encounter a funeral procession for a young man who died, leaving his widowed mother without anyone to care for her. Jesus calls him back to life and returns him to his mother restoring both this family unit and her means of survival. Perhaps most familiar to us is Lazarus. In John 11, the brother of Mary and Martha dies and is buried. After four days, Jesus arrives and demands that the tomb be opened. Lazarus emerges alive and is reunited with his sisters.

Restoration can happen in other ways, too. Mark 5 tells of when Jesus and His disciples came upon a man possessed by demons. These demons had given him the strength to break chains and had driven him to live among the tombs—a place of the dead making him unclean. Jesus casts out the demons and, before leaving, encourages the man to return to his community and family. John 4 speaks of a woman who comes to draw water from a well at noon—the heat of the day. Doing so would mean that she chose to come when no one else would be around because she was shunned by her community. In His conversation with her, Jesus gives her a message of promise and hope that she carries back to her village, where both the message and she are warmly embraced. Repeatedly in the gospels, Jesus heals lepers and others with maladies and diseases that cause them to be partially or completely cut off from family and friends. These healings bring about the kind of recovery and restored relationships that God desires for all of us.

Of course, the most significant story of restoration is the crucifixion. We are separated from God because of our sin. Hard as we might try, there is no way that we can make ourselves good enough to be acceptable to God. So, God come to us as Jesus, first to teach us of God's continued love for us, in spite of our sin. Ultimately, Jesus' death on the cross completely removes the burden and shame of sin so that nothing might stand between us and God. Paul puts it this way: But God demonstrates God's own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The cross for us should be a symbol of relationship. It points first, from God down to us and then from us back up to God; and second, from us to others. One of the most important ways that we can honor Christ's sacrifice for us is to seek to restore broken relationships, first between us and those with whom we have issues, and second, to help others find that same kind of healing. The cross should serve as a regular reminder to us that ours is a God of restored relationships.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey