

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 4-5-2021



Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, April 6, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for your enemies. Offer specific prayers for those who have hurt you, with whom you have major disagreements, and those whose behaviors annoy or irritate you. Ask God to bless them and grant them that which might be most beneficial for their lives.

Jesus said some hard things. Most of those were directed toward His followers. It's easy to pick and choose which ones we want to follow, and to only think about the ones we don't mind undertaking. But there are some that most of us will admit we haven't given much thought to. We don't mind hearing them, especially in church, but once we leave the church property, these are gone from memory. Perhaps, one of the most difficult comes from Matthew 5:43-44: "You have heard it said, 'Love you neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

This seems almost unthinkable. This is not how we do things. The world has a natural order to relationships and whether it's in sports, politics, international affairs, neighborhoods, or families, we draw our lines, protect our positions and boundaries, and never go across them. The Kingdom of God, however, sets higher

goals for us. We are given a different vision for what God's world might be like, and calls us to behave in ways that can change the world as we ourselves are changed.

In Kingdom terms, to love someone doesn't mean that you have to like them. The Greek words used in the Bible for "love" make distinctions we sometimes lose in our smashing together of all kinds of meanings for the word in English. Dictionary.com lists twenty-two definitions for "love"; the Urban Dictionary has thirty-six; yourdictionary.com has sixty-eight. No wonder we have problems when we say that we love something or someone. The Bible has four words for love: "storge" means empathy or compassion; "philia" is friendly affection; "eros" refers to romantic love; and "agape" is unconditional love. The love that Christ showed for us by dying on the cross is agape. Loving neighbor as self is also agape. And love for enemies is agape.

Agape has more to do with action than with feeling. Again, you don't have to like your "enemies" or "those who persecute you." But as Kingdom people, Jesus tells us to agape them. Jesus is not asking us to feel affection or even fondness for those with whom we disagree, quarrel, or despise. Jesus, however, is calling upon us act in love toward everyone—even those we dislike. One church sign had it this way: GOD REALLY MEANT THAT 'LOVE THY NEIGHBOR' THING.

Consider how the world would be different if more of us adopted this practice. What would happen if Democrats, Independents, and Republicans treated each other with agape? How would racial tension change if we overlooked our biases and prejudices and extended agape toward those who are different from us? Loving neighbor and praying for those with whom our relationships are not good is Kingdom work. It is the kind of things to which Jesus us calls us and is most what is needed today. When we love our enemies, we are following the example of our Father and Jesus. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! (Romans 5:8, 10)

In Christ's love,

Pastor Jeffrey