

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5-11-21



Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, May 11 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the economy of our country, for businesses that are in need of workers, and for those who desire an income that will sustain them in their life. Ask that businesses are more able to hire new workers and that people are able to find jobs that are gainful and fulfilling.

Jesus told three parables about the lost being found. All three are recorded in Luke 15: The Parable of the Lost Sheep, The Parable of the Lost Coin, and The Parable of the Lost Son (also called The Parable of the Prodigal Son). The message of these parables is that heaven rejoices whenever one who has lost their way from God is returned into God's Kingdom. They are powerful messages that remind us that the main mission of God's followers is to bring people to and back to God.

These parables, though, have another message as well. They remind us of how it often takes losing something or someone before we fully appreciate the value of what was lost. So much so that once the lost is found, there should and will be delight and celebration. It is easy, however, to overlook the lost and its tremendous worth to us, especially when our focus is on restoring things to the way they were. Imagine if those parables just ended with words like, "Good. Now that this missing sheep is back, I just need to return to watching all of them," or, "Finally I found that coin. Better make sure I keep tighter hold of it," or, "Well, my son is home again. Back to the chores."

The pandemic has caused us to lose something important to us. In truth, a lot of things, but I want to focus on a big one for the church. Many would say that what we lost was being able to do church in our building. Once we're inside again, some would even say that would be reason to celebrate. We now value the services we hold indoors more greatly, and we should rejoice once we can do that again.

I certainly agree with that, but I can't help but wonder if rather than causing us to lose this thing—indoor church—perhaps, the pandemic has helped us to find something we lost a long time ago. Our loss has not been the ability to be indoors for our services. Rather the loss has been in how meaningful and important worship is for us. Worship—real praise of our God and receiving what God has to offer to us at the beginning of each week—had, for many at least, become something taken for granted—just something you do on Sunday morning. For our congregation, the emphasis has not been on getting back into the building, but rather, being sure that we can have this special time with God, even if we are separated by the walls of cars, and sharing the sacrament in peel-open containers, and just waving to each other from a distance.

A few years ago, Pastor Mike Pilavachi asked the congregation he served what they were bringing to God in worship, or if they were just consumers, attending to be entertained. At their church, people seemed to come primarily to hear their band and he felt that the church had lost their way from worship. His solution was to stop every diversion and distraction, including their sound system and band. Initially, there was uncomfortable silence each week. Eventually, though, the congregation rediscovered their own voices, singing unaccompanied, offering up heartfelt prayers, and encountering God in a fresh way. Matt Redman was the leader of their praise band, and it led him to write the song, "Heart of Worship:"

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come.
Longing just to bring something that's of worth that will bless Your heart.
I'm coming back to the heart of worship, and it's all about You, Jesus.

Maybe instead of having lost something we're anxious to return to—the getting back to normal so many speak about—we have rediscovered the thing we really had lost—the importance of worship, and not how or where. As we are coming closer to a time of returning indoors (and things will not be what they were for at least time) might we rethink what it is about worship that we've been missing? Might we discover that we haven't really been missing that much, except what had been familiar and comfortable? Could we realize that during the past year or so, we have been blessed to be able to worship—really worship—in ways that were foreign and at first uncomfortable and not what we were used to, but worship, nonetheless? How will worship be for you once we move back into the building? Will it be a need to do what we've always done? Or, might it be a time to reflect on what we are doing and allowing what is offered to

wash over us with the real focus of worship—the praising and praying to God and the gift of what God offers to us? If so, that is indeed something to celebrate!

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey