

HEARTBEATS – Staying Connected

5/31/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, June 1 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, the one hundredth anniversary of the massacre of hundreds of black victims by white mobs in Tulsa, Oklahoma, pray for an end to racial division and violence in our country. Ask that we seek out the roots of systemic racism and work to see everyone as a loved child of God, no matter the color of their skin.

Sunday's gospel text was about one of the more interesting characters in the gospel narrative, Nicodemus. Nicodemus, apart from the disciples and Jesus, of course, is the only person who shows up multiple times in John's gospel. He is not unlike people we may encounter as we seek to share the good news with others. He is one who struggles to find a relationship with Jesus—one that he seems to want, but can't fully commit to for quite a while.

In John 3:1-17, we first meet him when he comes to talk to Jesus. He does so at night so that it is unlikely that he will be seen. As a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, he is concerned about how it will appear to others, and especially those with whom he regularly interacts if he is associated to Jesus. He recognizes that Jesus is someone special and connected to God, but isn't clear on what that connection means. He wants a closer relationship with God, and senses that it could come in relationship to Jesus, but his peers often scoff at and ridicule Jesus. That keeps him at best at arms distance from the Lord.

Nicodemus does progress in his faith, though. In John 7:25-52, he does sort of defend Jesus to his colleagues. It is not a profession of belief in Jesus, but does show a step toward openly committing to Jesus. When the chief priests and the Pharisees try to arrest Jesus, though Jesus dodges this attempt, they criticize all who are turning to Jesus. Nicodemus speaks up and reminds his associates that the law does not allow them to judge nor condemn Jesus without first giving Him a trial. They respond by rebuking

Nicodemus as well as showing disdain for Jesus simply because of the place from which He comes.

Finally, Nicodemus turns up again following the crucifixion of Jesus. Nicodemus accompanies Joseph of Arimathea in requesting Jesus' body, and then preparing and placing it in a tomb (John 19:38-42). Otherwise, Jesus would have been buried outside the city as a criminal, rather than being placed in proper resting place. Still not a profession of faith, but by this action, Nicodemus declares his loyalty to one who had just been convicted and executed for a capital offense.

For Nicodemus, like for many, faith doesn't happen right away. Many of us have always been part of the church and believed in Jesus. For others, that new commitment comes quickly and easily. Yet for some, like Nicodemus, it takes time—even a lot of time. For Nicodemus, it was almost three years. We need to be patient with those who just don't seem to jump in right away and recognize that it can be a longer journey of a few steps forward followed by a few steps back. Though it may be clear for us, for others it can be muddy and confusing. Additionally, there is that additional barrier of an inner fear about what others might think if a commitment to Christ is made. We need to remember as we strive to bring others into the family of God, that God is patient. God doesn't give up on anyone. God keeps working in and on and through each person, often through interactions with others like us. It has been said that most people can name somewhere between 9 to 25 significant people used by God in calling them to faith. You don't have to be the whole chain. Just be sure that you're not the missing link!

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey