

# HEARTBEATS – Staying Connected

## 6/21/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

***ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, June 22 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for an end to racial injustice. Pray for those who fall victim to racial prejudice. Ask God to help you become more sensitive to injustice and to give you the words to peacefully fight against it.***

The question of withholding Holy Communion from those who don't adhere to the policies or teachings of the church by Roman Catholic bishops that I wrote about last week brings up one of the most divisive issues in our country: trying to legislate morality. Politicians take positions on these issues, and many people will vote for those who support the moral position which they hold. And, as I wrote, it is not helpful when the church tries to control its members based on their feelings about moral topics.

Questions relating to abortion and the rights of a woman to choose what happens to her body, capital punishment and the death penalty, homosexual rights and freedoms, cloning, medical research using human embryos, gun ownership rights, and so on become hot topics that can divide families, political parties, neighbors, and church members. These are issues of morality and it can be very divisive when we try to legislate positions on these subjects. I've had people say, "You can't be a Christian and support abortion," or "You can't be a Christian and support the death penalty." Others will say, "You can't be a Republican and support this," or "You can't be a Democrat and support that." Yet I know many people within the same political party on both sides of issues, and I know faithful, committed Christians who are on opposing sides of controversial topics.

As Christians, the challenge for us is to figure out how to live out our faith in a political world. What happens when the teachings of the church where we worship, or the message of the Bible seems to contradict what we or the political party to which we are committed come into conflict. (And I think the Bible always trumps everything else, but even the Bible isn't always

clear.) Can you compartmentalize your political beliefs when they differ from your religious beliefs, and if not, to which do you give priority

Martin Luther said that we should always seek to do God's will, but there will be times when we don't know what God desires, or when any choice we make will be sinful. In those situations, Luther said we should first pray for God's guidance, and then sin boldly. Luther wasn't saying we should seek out opportunities to be sinful. Rather, when there is not a choice that isn't sinful, to pray to God, make our choice, and then do so as though confident in what we have chosen.

During World War II, Lutheran pastor, seminary professor, and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote and spoke vigorously in opposition to Adolph Hitler, and in particular about the imprisonment and execution of millions of Jews. A time came where Bonhoeffer was offered the opportunity to actively participate in an attempt to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer was faced with two choices, each of which was clearly sinful. He could join in the plot to assassinate Hitler and attempt to take the life of another human being, or he could refuse and allow the continued mistreatment and murder of so many innocent people. Either option was sinful. So, Bonhoeffer prayed and sinned boldly. He chose to help with the assassination plan, which failed, and Bonhoeffer was arrested and he, himself, was imprisoned and later executed.

When it comes to issues of morality, we Christians must struggle with what God wants for us to do. In particular, we face these challenges when it comes to voting on laws which or for candidates who take specific positions on these moral questions. God does not call us to be Democrats or Republicans. God calls us first to seek to follow the example of Christ and the teaching of Scripture, and to do so by being active in our political world. Yet, in those times where we simply can't be sure what God wills, or when candidates are on the side we support on one issue but oppose our position on another issue, the best thing to do is to pray. Ask for God's guidance, seek to gain a sense of what will most benefit our neighbor and help us to move closer to God, and then, when we just aren't sure, sin boldly.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey