

HEARTBEATS - Staying Connected

7/19/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, July 20 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the courage. Ask God for the strength to make the changes in life you feel God is calling you to make. Seek the confidence to show others through action and word the power of faith in Jesus.

Often, we receive religion or think about religion as something that brings calm and satisfaction. We want our faith and the practices that accompany it to lead us to peace, security, and certainty. This kind of thinking brings us to see God as a kindly benefactor (at least for us) and church as a place to come to escape the discontentment and disruptions of everyday life. We to hear that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads us beside cool, still waters, at least for an hour on Sunday mornings.

The Scriptures and particularly the Gospels, however, are not always that way. In fact, the message they bring depends more frequently on where we are as people of faith. One of the lessons we were taught in seminary about preaching the Gospels has to do with the listener's sense of contentment with life and openness to the message proclaimed. That lesson was and is that Scripture and especially the Gospels are to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." And the listener would know who she or he is based on whether the feeling after the message was one of comfort or affliction. If you were having a hard time, the Gospel message should be one of reassurance both for now and the future. But if you were one who felt you had everything you need and all was right with the world, the Gospel should upset you at least to a degree, and make you aware of the call of Jesus to be different or do more for those who are in need of your ministry and serving.

Another way to say this is that Scripture can be pastoral or prophetic. The pastoral nature of God's Word shows us the way to a place of greater hope

and promise. It is the assurance that God sees and cares about our needs, and will intervene to bring about that which God knows to be best for us. Those who hear this message are the ones to whom Jesus says, “Do you want to be healed?” and then promises, “Your faith has made you well.” We are not alone because God, who in Jesus lived as a human being, has full understanding of what we are going through and will bless us with God’s presence and expectation for the future.

The prophetic nature of the Word of God opens the eyes of the worshipping fellowship to the needs of the world around them. In particular, those whose lives have been focused on seeking personal gain and comfort while ignoring the needs of their neighbors around them will be challenged to reorient their values and goals to look beyond themselves. It is here that Jesus says, “Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor,” not because wealth is bad, but because it can become more important than the needs of others. Those who are so challenged will find themselves drawn into a community that is not always secure and satisfied, and seeing those shortfalls of society, be pushed to give themselves to the work of changing that community for the good.

Through both the pastoral and the prophetic, God again meets people where we are at. And then God seeks to bring us to where God wants us to be. God finds our growing edge and then moves us further, inch by inch, step by step, to the place where we can anchor our trust more fully in the One who created and saved us, the One who has chosen us and adopted us, the One whose love can never be taken from us. This is the God of Scripture, the One we should be ready to meet whenever we open God’s holy and blessed Word.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey