

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 8/27/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Diana Butler Bass in her book Christianity After Religion poses an intriguing question: “Who am I in God?” Having read her discussion of this question, I think perhaps it might be better asked, “How does knowing God is in me shape who I am?” I doubt that many of us think about our relationship with God this way, but we would do well to consider the promise that God dwells within us and consider how that informs and influences how we live our lives.

Both Jesus and Paul talk about this, but it may be easy to miss. In the fourteenth chapter of John, Philip says to Jesus, “Show us the Father.” Jesus replies, “*Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father living in Me, who is doing His work.*” Jesus then goes on to say, “*Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*” (John 14:12) None of us have any difficulty believing about the relationship of Jesus and the Father where the Father dwells within Jesus. But Jesus is also saying here that, through faith, God also is in us. That means that because of the faith that comes to us through the Holy Spirit, others can see God in us as we reflect Jesus through our words and actions. We don’t become God, but when we live in the faith that we have received, we show who God and Jesus are in our lives.

This is what Paul is encouraging when he tells us in I Corinthians and I Thessalonians to be “imitators” of Christ. In biblical times, people believed that God was in the Temple. That’s where you would go to see God. In I Corinthians 6:19, Paul says, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God.” Paul is saying that we are temples of God and that God through the Holy Spirit lives in us. Imitating Christ then means that, when we focus on God in us, we will try to act like Jesus, and then others will see God. Imitating Christ is not like an actor pretending to be Jesus. Rather it is remembering that how we behave and what we do reflects like a mirror the image of Jesus. That’s also what is captured in the church being called the “Body of Christ.” Because God is in us, our words and actions show to others who Christ is. And this is not just on Sundays when we go to church. It is each and every day.

Do we always get it right? Of course not. I know I fail far more than I succeed at doing this. Still, it is something that we can strive for. Beginning our days with prayer and finding times throughout the day to re-center ourselves in Christ are valuable steps for keeping this focus. So, too, how we respond to others is a reflection of the indwelling God. It is far easier to point out how others fail to reflect Christ in their behavior. Instead, when someone falls short, we should again try to be imitators of Christ and consider how He would respond to the person and not focus on how they should have acted.

Being imitators of Christ is certainly not easy. Nor is it something we will finally master. But for all of us who claim to be Christians—followers of Christ—the challenge is to try to reflect and be imitators of Christ at every opportunity. And we can grow in our ability to do this because we have the assurance from Jesus Himself that God is in each of us.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey