

## HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 10/4/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, October 5 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those with those who do not have a relationship with the Lord but who desire one. Pray for faithful Christians to invite others to come and see the love of God. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the courage to share your faith with those you know who do not know the Lord.*

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The Christian church has not always done things in ways that best reflect God's love and grace. For example, at times in its history the Christian church has aggressively evangelized at sword point or gun point. ("Do you want to be a Christian or do you want to die?") Another example is how the church has misused the gifts of God. The Reformation was triggered by Martin Luther's challenge to the practice of selling God's forgiveness in the form of indulgences. (This meant that the wealthy had greater access to God's grace than did those who were poor and could not afford to buy these papers that supposedly conveyed forgiveness.)

Often, when the church has erred, it has been because of a need to control its members. When the church began offering confirmation classes (Luther intended parents to teach their children the faith with the help of resources like worship and the Small Catechism), it became concerned that not all the young people were attending. So, it made the decision to start withholding Holy Communion until after confirmation. Thus, if you wanted your sins to be forgiven, you had to earn that gift from God by getting confirmed. By the way, it's not really a gift if you must earn it. God's grace and love are free gifts and should be available to all.

Sometimes the errors the Church has made have been because of misreading or misunderstanding Scripture. Many churches today feel that they must restrict who can have access to the Lord's Table, often citing I Corinthians 11:27 as the basis: So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Some have even mistakenly learned this passage to say, "without understanding" rather than "in an unworthy manner," thus justifying "no Communion until after confirmation." A church in the first town where I served as pastor (not ours) required members to come on Saturday to let the pastor know if they desired to take Holy Communion the next day. If the pastor felt you were not worthy, he would deny you the Sacrament. In college, a friend came to the campus church one Sunday to find that the campus pastor had decided to now offer Communion every Sunday. My friend began to leave because she had not examined herself under the Ten Commandments and had not recited the Lord's Prayer nor the Apostles' Creed as she had been taught, so she was not worthy to take Holy Communion. Our pastor pointed out to her that if she were to make herself worthy by doing these things, she would not need the forgiveness given in Holy Communion. We come to receive the sacrament in our unworthiness. She stayed. The unworthy manner Paul refers to in I Corinthians 11:27 had to do with the wealthy in Corinth eating their fill of the Sacrament (in other words,

greedily) while the poorer members often didn't receive any. It was the attitude with which you took Holy Communion that determined your worthiness.

The church also gets things amiss because of traditions that develop without proper consideration or scriptural support. Many congregations (ours included) begin our worship with the Confession and Forgiveness and later celebrate the Lord's Supper. Many feel they cannot take Communion without first having the Confession and Forgiveness. Certainly, confession is important before Communion as it makes us aware of our need for God's mercy, but when adding the Absolution, the Forgiveness, you've now had your sins forgiven before you come to the Table to, well, have your sins forgiven. (This is something I'm planning on modifying in the near future.) Originally, the Confession and Forgiveness were to be done on the Sundays when Communion was not offered. The tradition of having both Confession and Forgiveness and Holy Communion on the same Sunday evolved so that many churches now include both.

The Lutheran Church is a reforming church. This means that we regularly examine our practices. We ask why we do this, and in this way, and what does Scripture say about it. And when we find ourselves in error, we seek to correct ourselves. Even if it means changing tradition. Our ultimately goal always is to follow God's leading and vision for the Kingdom of God, especially as shown through the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is not our church; it is God's church. We are not to control who we think should receive God's grace and love; our task, again following Christ's example, is to make the gifts of God available to all. We don't have to protect God either; God can take care of Godself.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey