

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/28/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

Corporate Christianity is much easier, much more comfortable than individual Christianity. We feel content with most of what our congregation does for others, and though we may disagree with some few things, for the most part, we are okay with the actions of the congregation. More than this, being part of a congregation gives us a sense that we are living out our Christianity and making a difference in the world. That feeling may change when we look at it on an individual basis. Knowing that our church is contributing to food pantries and homeless programs can be satisfying, but we can and should feel more uncomfortable when we stop at the intersection and see the individual asking for assistance. It can be a lot more discomfoting to evaluate “my” Christianity than it is to consider “our” Christianity.

The Bible gives some good examples of what can happen when serving God moves from the more general to the personal. When Jesus told the rich young man to give all that he had to the poor, the man went away sad. It’s important to note that Jesus was not condemning wealth per se, but rather addressing a specific need this man had—that his wealth had become more important than God, so Jesus was pushing him to set that aside and to respond to the needs of others as God would want. On the other hand, when Jesus visited the home of Zacchaeus, this man was joyfully moved to, not only reimburse those he had cheated, but to give half of his wealth to the poor. Nevertheless, in each case, the individual response was challenging.

The personal challenge is not always about wealth, either. At election time, as we consider how we will vote, it can be instructive to ask ourselves a question that pushes us to look beyond our own needs. Rather than asking, “Am I better off than I was two or four years ago?” we might ask instead, “Is my neighbor better off than s/he was two or four years ago?” The second question may cause us to reevaluate our choices in candidates, especially when we broaden how we define who is our neighbor.

I served a church where I was told that the reason they had called me to be their pastor was to bring in new members. I responded by saying that my role as pastor was not only to bring in new members, but to equip them to bring in new members as well. They suddenly looked a bit uncomfortable.

We like supporting our congregation and doing so does accomplish much for the Kingdom of God. But it is important to recognize that Jesus equips His disciples so that they can carry on His work themselves, both corporately and individually. Doing this individually may be uncomfortable and even difficult, but when we accept Jesus’ call and find ways to put ourselves personally into service in His name, we will also find ourselves growing in our faith and in our joy. There is a saying that all of us might do well to ask to help us move from the corporate to the individual: “If Christianity were a crime, would there be enough evidence in my life to convict me?”

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey