

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/16/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, May 17 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for our nation as we again are confronted with a rash of deadly shootings. Pray for solutions to this form of violence. Pray for the victims of these senseless killings. And pray for those who are motivated to use lethal weapons as a response to the things that trouble them.*

Recently, Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee of the Northwestern Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America wrote about a documentary she had seen that talked about bodies. The documentary told how in our society, certain body types are acceptable and “beautiful” (usually thin, young, female, white, etc.) and other body types are not (usually overweight, aged, disabled, disfigured, etc.). A suggestion in the program as a counteraction to society’s body-shaming culture was to stand in front of a mirror and look at your body. As you look, name out loud the positive things that you see. Do this for five minutes. (Five minutes is a long time!) And Bishop Wee said that, in all honesty, she had a much easier time naming her body’s deficits than attributes.

In scripture, we talk about the Church as the body of Christ. And congregations are church bodies. And just as human bodies are critiqued by society, church bodies are also scrutinized and evaluated. When I have spoken at other church gathering, following the presentation, I’m often asked how big is the church I serve. (I usually answer, “about a quarter-of-a-block.”) The question suggests that my credibility as a speaker is dependent upon the size of the church I’m serving. A church that has 400 members is “sexier” than one that has just 100 or fewer. A church with younger members is more attractive than a church with an older membership, so society would suggest. The “beauty” of a church depends on what ministries it provides. Certainly, when someone is looking for a church home, the demographics and ministries are a concern. But we can become discouraged when we compare our church to other churches, especially if they have a larger attendance or bigger budget than we.

What, though, if we did like that documentary suggested? What if we looked at our congregation and listed the many positives that are part of it and are offered here? More than this, what if we talked about the things that God is doing through our congregation?

God never intended that every church be the same. There is tremendous value in diversity of size and giftedness and ministry offerings. The same is true as we look at other churches. As sisters and brothers in Christ, we would do well to embrace and celebrate what each church has to offer as it contributes to the overall mission of God in the world. If we find ourselves comparing churches to determine who is better than whom, let us instead remember Paul’s words in I Corinthians 12:12-13: *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey