

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 7/11/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, July 12 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the opportunity to build bridges with others and create positive, valuable relationships. Ask God to lead us to others with whom we can converse and develop connections. Pray that the Holy Spirit provide us with the words that will guide us to establishing acquaintances and friendships that might open the door to Christian witness in the future.*

Lately I've been thinking a lot about church growth and direction. Actually, I think about these things all the time, but I have been especially lately. So, I've decided to share some of those thoughts with you that you might be more aware of the dynamics of the church, present and future.

Increasingly, people today are oriented toward entertained. We have incredible options, even in our own homes with television offerings, virtual activities, and more. That has influenced our perceptions about presentations in church, and the musical offerings in particular.

Matt Redmond is a performer and composer of a number of songs done by our Praise Team in worship. One of those songs is titled "The Heart of Worship," and was written by Matt in the late 1990's when his home church, Soul Survivor, in Watford, England was going through a struggle to find a quality or dynamic in their worship. "The pastor did a pretty brave thing," Matt recalls. "He decided to get rid of the sound system and band for a season, and we gathered with just our voices. His point was that we'd lost our way in worship, and the way to get back to the heart would be to strip everything away." Reminding the congregation to be producers of worship and not just consumers, Pastor Mike Pilavachi asked, "When you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?" Eventually, people encountered God in a fresh way. During that time, Matt wrote, "The Heart of Worship:"

*When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come.
Longing just to bring something that's of worth that will bless Your heart...
I'm coming back to the heart of worship, and it's all about You, Jesus.*

A number of congregations today, especially megachurches, have invested heavily in their worship music programs, paying musicians and bands to "perform" for those gathered. Very often these performances are followed by rounds of applause in appreciation for the music, much like at a concert or other entertainment event. But while the music is about God and Jesus, the applause is given for the performers and not for God. Yet, when we come to worship, we are offering ourselves in praise of God and opening ourselves to what God has to offer to us, to equip us for the week ahead. Recently, I suggested that we opt, rather than to clap for the performers, instead to wave our hands in the air—the hand motion in American Sign Language for applause. I suggested that we do this to show our appreciation to God. Not that we don't value our performers, and we can certainly tell them how much the music they offer means to us, but our focus in worship should be God. Waving our hands can be a different way to praise God, and it doesn't have to be limited just to after the music. We can offer the same praise following a meaningful scripture reading or sermon, or after the prayers or communion, or even when the offering or the announcements have finished. In some congregations, the members

actually call out, “Thank you, Jesus,” following a moving message or piece of music. That’s not a very Lutheran thing to do, but we can grow in how we praise God and actually express our feelings of joy and approval and praise. It’s not that clapping isn’t okay, and it still is. But when we seek to make our worship about our praise of God, perhaps waving hands can be one way to get back, as Matt Redmon says, “to the heart of worship.”

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey