

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 9/30/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

A hallmark of Lutheran theology is our emphasis that we are “justified (found not guilty) by grace (as a gift from GOD) through faith (belief in JESUS—HIS death and resurrection) alone.” Our relationship with GOD begins with faith and everything we do from that point forward is our response to what GOD has done for us (grace) and not by what we have tried to earn. Therefore, faith, often emphasized as a “saving faith,” should be a primary concern for us as we seek to have our faith grow and be strong so that we can continue to receive GOD’S grace abundantly. Toward that goal, there are at least four activities or paths in which every Christian should be involved, and it is important to find a balance in all four.

First is the Contemplative Path. The central practices of this path are worship and prayer. We do this in worship on Sunday and in our daily devotions and conversations with GOD and with other Christians. Sadly, many believe that weekly worship is all that is expected of Christians and is an adequate demonstrating of their love and appreciation for GOD. There are also those who walk this path to an extreme in contemplative practices that include isolation from the rest of the world in cloisters and monastic living. These choices are out of line with a balanced faith life apart from the other paths. Regular and frequent worship and prayer are important but must be done in connection with the other paths.

Second, is the Path of Virtue or Holiness. On this path, one tries to avoid sinful behavior, striving to live the life one believes GOD wants for her or him. Many people believe this path is the way to earn GOD’S love and blessing—that, if we live a good enough life, GOD will give us what we need/want. Lutherans, however, recognize that, again, because of faith we have already received GOD’S gifts of forgiveness and purpose, and the promise of life eternally with GOD. We don’t have to earn anything. By grace received in faith alone, these are ours even now, so instead, everything we do is our response to GOD’S precious gifts in CHRIST. Because of what GOD has done for us, therefore we seek to live as we believe GOD would want us.

The third is the Path of Compassion. CHRIST’S call to “serve others as I have served you,” is the invitation to reflect the grace we have received through our actions of assistance, support, and mercy for others. JESUS’ words that “as you have done this for the least of these, so you have done it for ME,” is the encouragement that the best way we can show our love to CHRIST is by showing love to those for whom HE died (which, by the way, is everyone). One of the hardest aspects of this path is mercy—forgiving others as we have been forgiven and beginning with ourselves. As CHRIST died to forgive us, we must forgive others. In all our acts of compassion done in CHRIST’S name, we will find our faith growing.

Fourth is the Path of Witness. There’s a saying that if you cross a Lutheran with a Jehovah’s Witness, you get someone who knocks on your door and then stands there and doesn’t say anything. Yet sharing our faith in GOD, telling others the story of JESUS’ love for all people, and inviting others to come and meet the LORD are the fulfillment of JESUS’ final instruction to HIS followers: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY SPIRIT, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Outside of our own children, Lutherans are not great at talking about faith with others. Yet, when we realize that talking about these things might make the difference for another in coming to a saving faith or not, we can find the motivation to seek these important conversations. It is challenging to think about walking this path, but with the Great Commandment of JESUS to make disciples also comes HIS promise: “And surely I am with you always.”

It is a worthwhile practice for each of us to take time (Sunday morning is a good opportunity to do this) and ask ourselves how balanced have we been in following these fourth paths? Balanced doesn’t necessarily mean equal. But it does suggest that we make sure that we are giving attention to each aspect. When we find

ourselves a bit short in one area, we can dedicate more time to that focus. Doing these things will help our faith grow and thrive so that we might continue to receive all that GOD has to offer to us.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey