

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 10/3/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, October 4 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, continue to pray for those in our country and world who are facing challenges as a result of recent hurricanes and storms. Pray also for the work of agencies like Lutheran Disaster Response who work to bring aid and support to those in devastated areas.*

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When I was in college, I began to date a woman I will call Carla. We met at the Lutheran Campus Ministry church we attended. It seemed a nice relationship in spite of the fact that I was a member of the American Lutheran Church (former ELCA) and she was a member of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. We dated for several months until the semester ended, and we each went home for the summer.

When we returned to school in the fall, Carla was distant and kept avoiding me. I didn't know what was wrong, but I gave her space. After several weeks, Carla asked me to go for a walk. We found a somewhat isolated space and sat down. Carla looked at me and said that over the summer, she had come to a realization. "If I don't feel comfortable with a man who treats me as well as you do," she said, "I'm never going to feel comfortable with a man." Then, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she said, "Over the summer I came to realize that I'm a lesbian. But," she added, "I don't want to be."

That conversation has helped me to understand that sexual orientation is not a choice, though many try to present it that way. For Carla and for many, many others, it is the way GOD created them. If you think about it, there are many who are gay, or lesbian, or bisexual, or transgendered, or any of several other orientations who would not have chosen that for themselves, but it is who they are. It is who GOD created them to be.

I share this not to create debate about sexual orientation but to encourage us to consider what it means for those who are other than heterosexual, but who are also people of strong faith. Carla had been active in the Lutheran Church ever since she was born. She loved JESUS and the church and knew it was where she belonged. She also knew that the church is often a very unwelcoming place for many different people, but that GOD loved her and, in baptism, had made her GOD'S own.

In Acts 10, Peter has a vision of something like a large sheet being let down from heaven, filled with all kinds of animals. This included animals that Peter had been taught Jews do not eat. When a voice from heaven invites Peter to eat of any of the animals in the vision, Peter insisted that he would not eat anything that was unclean. The voice then tells Peter not to call anything unclean which GOD has made clean. This happened just before Peter was invited to go to the home of a Roman centurion, a Gentile, and unclean to Jews. Because of the vision, Peter went and Cornelius the centurion and his entire household, unclean Gentiles, came to believe in JESUS and all received the HOLY SPIRIT, something the new Christian church had not believed possible until then. Those early Christian Jews believed that the gospel of JESUS CHRIST was only for them. In just a few years after this, though, non-Jews all over the known world were faithful follower of JESUS.

All of us are sinful. All of us regularly commit acts and say things that make us unclean before GOD. Yet, we believe that faith changes that. Through faith, GOD declares us clean. We are saved

by grace through faith alone. Yet there are many who judge and condemn those whose behaviors are contrary to what they believe GOD wants. (Actually, haven't all of us failed to live as GOD desires?) And though they have claimed the forgiveness that GOD offers through faith, they refuse to extend that same grace to those others. That doesn't make sense. If you are going to acknowledge that it is through faith that GOD has redeemed and claimed you, then it must be the same for all. We are not saved by one standard and other rejected by the same. We believe that by faith we are saved, and we should rejoice whenever another receives that same promise through faith as well.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey