

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 10/31/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, November 1 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for our nation as we approach another time of election. Ask for peace and tolerance, especially when the votes don't go as we might want. Pray that those who are unhappy with the results choose peaceful means for expressing their disappointment. Ask GOD to grant us calm and a sense of unity even when we see so much division in our hopes.*

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One of the things I find fascinating about the Bible and that leads me into long periods of pondering are the stories that leave the questions in front of us. Certainly, there are stories that have very clear outcomes and often lessons for us, but I am frequently intrigued by those stories that sort of leave us hanging, wondering what the outcome might be. Such questions, of course, lead us to think about what decision we might make and to consider directing our lives toward those outcomes that would be most pleasing to GOD. In particular, there are a number of these types of stories in the gospels, both as actual encounters with JESUS and in parables told by HIM.

One such story is that of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-21, who comes to JESUS and asks HIM what he must do to inherit eternal life. JESUS, in reply quotes the commandments to him, to which the ruler says he has kept all of these. Rather than debating this with him, JESUS, who were told feels compassion for the man, tells him that he needs to do only one other thing: *“Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow ME.”* First, it is worth noting that JESUS tells such a thing to no one else, suggesting that wealth is an issue specifically for this man. JESUS seems to be pointing out the one thing this young man has made most important in his life, and encourages him to set it aside and instead put JESUS first. We're told that the young ruler goes away sad because he had great wealth. Though the implication is that he chooses wealth over JESUS, I always wonder what the rich man ultimately decides to do. His initial question is about eternal life and JESUS points him toward that in HIS reply, but I often question if he can make such a significant change in his life. It also leads me to consider what might there be in my life that I need to get rid of because it interferes with my full commitment to CHRIST.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 is rich with lessons and challenges to us and to our relationship with GOD. Most of the time, we will find ourselves identifying with the son who takes his father's wealth, squanders it, and then returns in hope of having even the most meager chance of a connection with his father again. Representing GOD'S response to our sinfulness and rejection of GOD'S will for us, the father welcomes the son back and restores him to his full sonship in the family. But the real challenge for us is to consider ourselves from the perspective of the older brother. He disdains the frivolous and wasteful life of his brother prior to his return. Clearly, he has investigated and knows what his brother has been doing. But when his father comes to invite him to the party he is throwing for his younger son, the older son is left with a decision. Should he reject his brother or should he rejoice in his return? Even more, should he celebrate that return in light of his father's response? And, if you dig deeper, you will realize that he has known all along that his father's greatest desire is to have his son back. The older brother has known where his brother was and what he was doing, but made no effort to bring his brother back home to his father. The story is far more challenging when look at ourselves in light of the older brother and then consider those who have strayed from our heavenly FATHER. What should be our response to those who seek a relationship with the ONE who they had previously rejected? And what should we do when we encounter those who are not even making an effort to meet our FATHER?

Still another is the story of the Samaritan woman who meets JESUS at the well in the heat of the day in John 4:4-30. At the end of that encounter, she tells her village about JESUS and the come to believe in HIM

too. But during her conversation with JESUS, HE points out that she has had five husbands and now lives with a man to whom she is not even married. She comes to draw water from the well in the heat of the day because she doesn't want to meet anyone else or isn't treated kindly when she does. But what is her life like after that encounter with JESUS? What is her relationship like with her village? Does she change her ways that have caused at least the women of the village to shun her?

There are so many other such episodes that can lead us to consider what might be the rest of the story. What is life like for Lazarus after being returned to life? How do the disciples treat Peter after he first walks on the water and then sinks, only to be saved by JESUS? What of the man from whom JESUS casts out a legion of demons into a herd of pigs, but after asking to go with JESUS is told to remain in his village? Or those whom JESUS confronts over their disdainful treatment of the "less desirable," the ones toward whom JESUS has shown favor? So many encounters. So many questions. So many opportunities to grow in our faith by taking time to ponder what might be the rest of their stories.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey