

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/21/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, November 22, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who will be alone during the holidays. Ask that GOD sends people like us to invite them to join in family celebrations and to assure them that, when they feel alone, they are not. Pray the HOLY SPIRIT shows you who and how you can be a presence in the life of someone who really needs you.*

It is a blessing that each week we get to hear a portion of GOD'S Word in worship. Over the course of three years, we cover material from all four gospels, plus other readings from the New Testament and the Old Testament. But a downside of this, and a good argument for attending Bible study, is that these readings, in one sense, are just very small glimpses into the whole of the Bible. There is much we miss or are unable to address when we focus on short individual stories or teachings on Sundays. In his book, What Is the Bible? author Rob Bell encourages us to "fly high" over the Bible to discover the bigger messages and pictures we miss when we on up close.

For example, the beginning of the Bible, Genesis, starts with a picture of GOD'S intent for all existence. There is a Garden with a Tree where GOD places human beings to live and to thrive. But we know that because of human sin, because of our desire to be like GOD, and our choice to go our own way, we lose the Garden as our home. Now, if you skip ahead to the end of the Bible, to chapters 22 and 23 of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, you find the final outcome of GOD's plan for all creation. The forces of evil are defeated, sin is overturned, and all who believe are called to dwell with GOD for eternity. Where? (I'm glad you asked.) In a Garden. With a Tree. Just like GOD intended.

Or how about Genesis and Ruth? In Genesis, GOD chooses Abraham to be the father of a great nation. Through Abraham's family, all people will be blessed. And one chapter later, Abraham and his nephew, Lot, have such large flocks that they can't live together on the same land. So, Abraham offers Lot the first choice and he picks out the nice grasslands of the valley, and leaves Abraham with the scrub country of the hills. And in doing so, Abraham's family is divided. Now fast forward, or jump ahead to the Book of Ruth, and you will read about a Moabite woman (Ruth) who marries the son of an Israelite woman. After he dies in the first few verses, Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, decides to return to Israel, the land of her ancestors. Ruth says she wants to go with her, and although Naomi urges her to stay in her own homeland of Moab, Ruth follows her to a little town called Bethlehem. (Sounds like a song, doesn't it?) There, at Naomi's urging, Ruth makes an explicit sexual overture to a man named Boaz. She goes to him at night and uncovers his feet. Which really means that...well, you can finish that part. (Did you know the Bible had such stories?) So, Boaz decides to marry Ruth, and together, they have a son, Obed. And Obed, according to I Chronicles has a son named Jesse. And Jesse has a number of sons, the youngest of whom is David. That's right. That David, who becomes King David. And fourteen generations later, David's descendants, Mary and Joseph, have a son called JESUS. But I forgot to mention that the Moabites, the tribe of Ruth, were the descendants of, you guessed it, Lot. So, in Obed, the family is reunited. And in JESUS, the family blesses all people. Pretty neat, huh?

Or, then there's Acts. At the beginning of the Book of Acts, JESUS, before he ascends to heaven, tells HIS followers that they will be filled with the HOLY SPIRIT and, with that power, they will carry HIS message starting from Jerusalem to Judea (the area around Jerusalem), and Samaria (the area east and north of Judea), and to the ends of the earth. But the disciples stay in Jerusalem. Well, you can check off the first part of JESUS' plan, but they just don't get going from there. In fact, by chapter eight of Acts, they're still in Jerusalem. That is until a young believer named Stephen preaches to a Jewish crowd in such away that the crowd kills him. And the religious leaders decide to take care of the rest of those followers of JESUS as well.

So, some of them flee Jerusalem and go out into the Judean countryside around Jerusalem and tell people about JESUS. And that message gets carried up to Antioch, which is in Samaria where people also come to believe. And the church in Antioch soon sends Barnabas and Paul as missionaries into Asia Minor and Greece. And when we get to the end of Acts, we find Paul in Rome, which was pretty much the end of the earth as the people of that time knew it. JESUS words at the beginning of Acts, which can be read as a plan for evangelism, were also a prophecy of how things were going to go. And even though the early Christians were pretty comfortable staying where they were, GOD had other ideas and found a way to make sure that prophecy was fulfilled.

There's lots of these big, sweeping stories in the Bible, like the Israelites coming out of Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea and then wandering in the wilderness for forty years before they get to enter the Promised Land, and JESUS coming out of the waters of the Jordan River after baptism and then being in the wilderness for forty days before beginning HIS public ministry announcing the Promises of GOD. But you have to take the time to read them. Or really study them. And when you do, you begin to see how much GOD participates in all that happens and, more importantly, how GOD'S plan for our world is being and will be accomplished in spite of us and according to GOD'S vision. So, make a commitment to find time to dig in deeper and discover all the wonderful stuff that GOD through its writers has put into the Bible. Try it. I think you'll like it.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey