

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/28/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, November 29, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those in our society who are discriminated against. Take time to name in your prayers the groups are disenfranchised and abused and even killed because of perceived differences. Ask GOD to protect them and to show us how we can work to share GOD'S love for all people with them.*

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I am an amateur etymologist. Etymology is the study of the origin of words and phrases and how their meanings change over time. Some of our most familiar expressions often began with very different connotations than with which we use them today. Here are several examples somewhat related to each other.

In Europe during the Middle Ages, much of the dishware was made of pewter, an alloy of tin, and sometimes copper, and large portions of lead. Though it was much more durable than stoneware dishes, pewter was not a good substance off of which to eat or drink. The lead in the plates, bowls, and tankards would leach out and could cause lead poisoning, especially when exposed to alcohol like beer, wine, or mead. People would sometimes die from this lead poisoning, or at least appear dead for a time. Sometimes, at funerals for those who had died for unknown reasons (lead poisoning), the deceased would suddenly sit up in their casket. The lead poisoning had not killed them but had made them comatose for a time. This started people wondering about others who had been buried, so they began digging people up and checking their caskets, only to find scratch marks inside. They realized that a number of people had been buried without truly being dead. (Here's where it gets interesting and the etymology enters in.) So, they started tying a string around the wrist of the deceased when the person was buried. The string ran up through the ground and was tied to a bell. Then someone was hired to stand watch overnight—called "*the graveyard shift*." If the bell started ringing, meaning that someone who had been buried was still alive, the person on watch would dig as fast as they could to try to rescue the buried bellringer. If they failed to make it in time, the person would be a "*dead ringer*." But if they succeeded, the buried person would be "*saved by the bell*." Another thing that people did was to hold off on having a funeral right away. Instead, they would place the deceased person on the kitchen table, invite over friends and family to eat food and tell stories about the person who had died, and to wait to see if the person would awaken. This type of gathering came to be known as a "*wake*."

Recently, I learned about another phrase we use today that comes from Old Testament times. Before there were elaborate legal systems and contract law and all these things we have today when people enter into contracts, they did something else. If two people made a deal, it was called a covenant. In a covenant, each party made an oath to fulfill their part of the bargain. And to seal this covenant, they would get some animals, like a cow, or a ram, or a goat, or a dove. Then you would chop the animal or animals in half and then lay the halves out with a space between them, a sort of aisle. Then, both people would stand at one end of the aisle and each would say what it was they were committing to do. And then, both would walk between the animal halves and say something like this: "May I become like these animals if I fail to uphold my end of the covenant." And this procedure came to be known as "*cutting a deal*." Fascinating, huh?

By the way, there are a number of covenants in the Bible that GOD makes with humankind. For example, "*I will be your GOD and you will be MY people*." Or, "*I will bless you...and you will be a blessing*." But covenants with GOD end up different than other covenants. Because when GOD makes a covenant, GOD always keeps it. Even when we don't. We haven't always done a good job of being GOD'S people. But GOD has always been our GOD even when we have rejected GOD. And GOD has always blessed us. Even when we haven't done such a good job of being a blessing to others. That's an important thing to understand. That even when we choose to go our own way or fail to do what we promise (and this doesn't mean that it's okay to

neglect our commitments) GOD always keeps GOD'S part of the covenant. GOD didn't just "cut a deal" with us. GOD made a covenant. And one of the things that the Bible tells us, in fact promises us, is that GOD always keeps GOD'S promises.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey