

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/19/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, December 20, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who don't have a good relationship with GOD. Pray that the HOLY SPIRIT might touch their lives in such a way that they are drawn closer to GOD. Ask that GOD send faithful believers to help those who need more of GOD to discover GOD'S love for all people.*

Did you know that there is a second Good Samaritan story in the Bible? Sort of? In the Old Testament? Before I tell you about it, though, a little background, and it is background for both stories.

The Assyrians were mean, nasty, violent, abusive, and oppressive to those who were not of their nation. If you read II Kings, you'll find that their usual way of operating was to invade, conquer, deport, and occupy. That last part—occupy—is what led to the Samaritans. The Assyrians, hundreds of years before JESUS, had conquered Israel and done all those things I just mentioned, including occupying. They invaded, conquered, and deported most of the men to Assyria, and a number of the Assyrian men remained in Israel to make sure the remaining people behaved. And a number of them got married and their offspring, these Israelite-Assyrian mixed people came to be known as Samaritans.

So, now that you know that, let me tell you about the story of Jonah and the big fish. You probably know something about it, but let me first say that it wasn't a whale. All you have to do is read the Book of Jonah and you'll see that it was a big fish. Now Jonah was an Israelite and GOD told Jonah to carry a message to the great city of Nineveh to repent and turn to GOD. And Nineveh was where? In Assyria. So, of course, Jonah doesn't want to go to the land of their greatest enemy and takes off in the opposite direction. And since Assyria was what we call today Iraq, that meant Jonah to go the other way took off for a cruise on the Mediterranean Sea. But a storm comes up, and the crew decides that someone on the ship is the reason for the storm, and they determine that the person is Jonah, so they throw him overboard. And along comes a big fish—not a whale—that swallows Jonah whole. Jonah then does what anyone of us would do in such a situation—he prays. A lot. In the belly of the fish. And, after three days, the fish spits him out onto the land.

Jonah, figuring this is GOD'S way of saying, "You're going to Nineveh whether you like it or not," goes to Nineveh to tell them to repent, and expects to be killed there for his words. But, the Ninevites actually listen to Jonah's message and they repent. They actually turn to GOD and repent. In fact, to show how repentant they are, they all put on sack cloth. Even the animals. And Jonah, after all this success, gets so depressed that he wants to kill himself. Why? Because these awful, rotten, terrible Assyrians are going to be forgiven by GOD. And Jonah just doesn't want to live with that.

Now, in the story of the Good Samaritan, a man is robbed and left for dead. And two solid, upstanding Israelites separately comes upon him and each walks by on the other side. Which isn't easy because that road is very narrow with a rock wall on one side and a cliff on the other. But they're more concerned about themselves and what might happen to them if they stop, so they keep going. And then a Samaritan, one of those hated Assyrian-Israelite half-breeds helps the guy. And JESUS, in telling the story, says that we should do the same. We should, whenever we can, help whoever is in need.

So, here's Jonah, and GOD is sending him to help the Assyrians in Nineveh because they are in need. They really need a good relationship with GOD. And Jonah doesn't think they deserve it, just like the listeners to JESUS parable don't think the Samaritan deserves to be the hero of the story who does what GOD wants all of us to do. But that's the point of both these stories. It's not our call. It's GOD's call. Our call is simply to do

what GOD wants us to do and what GOD wants us to do is to help everyone in need and especially when they need a little more GOD in their life. So, the parable of the Good Samaritan ends up with JESUS challenging the lawyer to whom HE is talking to help anyone who is in need. And the story of Jonah ends with GOD asking Jonah, "Shouldn't I have concern for the great city of Nineveh?" And, of course, the answer is, "Yes," and the implication is that if GOD cares about Assyrians, or Samaritans, or whoever it is that we think is unworthy of GOD'S love, we still should care because GOD does. And even though the two stories aren't quite the same, the message for us is. If there are those that we don't think are deserving of a relationship with GOD, we need to have a change of heart and do our very best to help them get to where GOD wants them to be in their life. And in doing so, by having that change of heart, we actually get closer to where GOD wants us to be our own lives. And that's what GOD wants, too.

In CHRIST'S LOVE,
Pastor Jeffrey