

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/2/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Some years ago, I served a church that had been emotionally abused by my immediate predecessor. Because of this, there was a high distrust of pastors in general and me in particular, even before I started. One day, about three-and-a-half years after I began serving there, a member of the church council who had served on the call committee that had recommended me to the congregation came to my office. He said he needed to talk to me because he “just didn’t trust me.”

He said, “I think you were planted here by the synod.”

“Why do you think that?” I asked.

“Because we interviewed nine other pastors and you were the only one that fit what we were looking for. I think they set it up so we would have to choose you.”

“Why do you think the synod did that?”

“Because they sent you here to close us down,” he said.

“And why do you think they want to close this congregation?” I inquired.

“Because they want to sell the property. They want to close churches to get the money,” he exclaimed.

“It would be much of a synod if all the churches were gone,” I suggested.

“Oh...I didn’t think of that,” he said.

“You know, if I wanted to close this church, that would have happened the first year I was here. But it’s been over three years, and were still open.”

“Well, I’m still not sure,” he said.

“If I was going to close this congregation,” I asked, “why would I have bought a home in this community?”

“Oh...I didn’t think of that,” he said.

“And if we were going to close,” I continued, “why would I have written a three-year grant for our community youth program last month?”

“Oh...I didn’t think of that either,” he answered.

“And why would I have invited three new households to join us in two weeks?”

“Oh...I didn’t think of that. I guess I was wrong.”

His attitude toward the work we were doing as a council and a congregation changed after that conversation. But, sadly, for three-and-a-half years, he had been carrying around this suspicion that had impacted his involvement in the church. His lack of trust had prevented him from being open to GOD'S leading.

I think one of the reasons why Matthew quotes from the Old Testament so often has to do with building trust with his readers. Not trust with for recipients in the writer, but trust in JESUS. The Jews revered the prophets and believed in the prophecies these foreseers had made about the future and the coming MESSIAH. So, Matthew, who was writing to a Jewish audience, often cited passages about the MESSIAH and then showed how JESUS fulfilled those prophecies: things like coming from Bethlehem (where JESUS was born), and being a Nazarene (someone from Nazareth where JESUS grew up), or being lifted up on a tree (to describe JESUS' death on the cross), and so on. By making these connections, Matthew helped the Jews who read his gospel to trust, to have faith, that JESUS was the SAVIOR that GOD, through the prophets, promised to send. I can't help but wonder if, when they read all of these prophecies and then looked at how JESUS had done the things that were predicted, that when they took time to look at the evidence about JESUS and considered whether JESUS really could be the MESSIAH, the SAVIOR, if some of them didn't stop and say, "Oh...I didn't think of that."

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey