

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/16/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, January 17, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who serve our communities as first-responders. Ask GOD to keep them safe as they seek to give aid, support, and protection to others. Give thanks to GOD for these committed individuals who have chosen to offer their time and abilities in service this way.*

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A few weeks ago, a gentleman stopped by the church and asked to talk with me. He and his wife had found a church they wanted to join. The church said they needed to be baptized which the husband was more than willing to do. His mother-in-law, however, when she heard that they were going to be baptized said, "Absolutely not. My daughter has already been baptized." Indeed, she had been, as an infant, in the Lutheran Church. Thus, he wanted to talk to a Lutheran minister about baptism.

I shared with him that Lutherans believe that baptism is once and for all. To say someone needs to be rebaptized (as some traditions do) is really to say that whatever GOD did in the first baptism didn't take and it has to be done over again. Those traditions that say you have to be baptized in their church are putting themselves and what they do ahead of what GOD does in baptism. Furthermore, rebaptism denies what the Bible says in Ephesians 4:5-6: *one LORD, one faith, one baptism, one GOD and FATHER of us all, who is over all and through all and in all.* Rebaptism rejects that there is one baptism, suggesting that there can be multiple baptism based on what the person chooses, rather than the one baptism which our GOD and FATHER gives to us.

He agreed with that, but then he pointed out that because his wife had been baptized as an infant, it didn't count, because she didn't know what was happening and hadn't made the decision herself. We talked about baptism as a gift from GOD, with which he fully agreed. But when I asked if he had received gifts from others when he was an infant, he said, "Yes," but that this was different. He insisted that you have to know what baptism is about before you can receive it. I said that this then makes baptism less of a gift and, rather, something that you earn by understanding it. In other words, those who are too young to understand baptism aren't worthy of receiving this gift, even though it is given by GOD without qualification. While he did want to hang on to the truth that baptism is a free gift from GOD and not something that we earn, he still didn't think it could be received by someone who didn't know or didn't choose to be baptized. And, after all, JESUS was baptized as an adult, he pointed out.

I shared with him some of the passages that talk about entire households being baptized like the household of Cornelius the centurion in Acts 10, and Lydia's in Acts 16, and the Philippian jailer's also in Acts 16. In biblical times, a household was understood to be everyone over whom the head of the household had influence. This included spouse, employees, servants, slaves, and, yes, even children. These passages suggest to us that infant baptism was practiced from the earliest times in Christian history. And, again, if it is a gift from GOD to all whom GOD loves, then it is not something we earn or deserve by virtue of age or understanding.

I also shared the story of a 32-year-old man who was a member of a congregation I previously served. This man was severely disabled mentally. His mother said he had the mind of a kindergartner, but I don't think it reached even that level. I asked my guest if this man should be refused baptism (and also communion) because of his inability to understand the sacrament? He said, "No," but immediately recognized that if it was because of his age that he could receive it, then it was, again, something he had "earned," so to speak.

The gentleman said he had to leave and thanked me for the conversation. I think he was disappointed because he didn't get the answer he wanted, but he also said that he appreciated this perspective on baptism and would have to think about it. The last thing I shared with him was the fact that baptism is not eternal life insurance, something that saves us just because we've done it or had it done to us. We are saved by faith and baptism is the outward sign that we or those who bring us believe in CHRIST JESUS. He heartily agreed with that, which allowed me to assure him that, whatever he and his wife decided to do regarding their church's practice of baptism, that they could take comfort in knowing that they both believed, and that for GOD, that was all that mattered.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey