

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/20/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Our nature, our tendency, is to revert to whatever is familiar and comfortable. Especially when things are more stressful, we cling to what we have known and the behaviors that bring calm in the midst of discomfort. In times of unexpected or uncontrolled change, we look for ways to bring stability into our lives.

Years ago, after our first daughter was born, my late wife, Lori, and I came to California to visit my parents with the baby. It was joyful to bring to my parents their first granddaughter. But it was also different to be in my home environment with a wife and a child. In the afternoon of our second day there, I was in the family room watching television. Lori came in, rather exasperated, and asked, “Why aren’t you helping me with the baby?” Helping to look after our daughter was something I greatly enjoyed doing and with which I was very involved in our home in Wisconsin. But here, in my parent’s home, I unconsciously went back to what was familiar from when I was in high school: relaxing in the family room. That’s what I had been accustomed to doing when I live at home before college, and that’s what seemed to feel “normal” upon our return. Gratefully, Lori had called me out of the past to what was now our present and future: being a family and sharing responsibilities.

I wonder if this reverting to the comfortable and familiar isn’t what has happened to many of our members and friends at St. Andrew. For more than two years, we have been unable to gather for worship or other activities in the ways we had prior to the pandemic. We have had to protect ourselves and others from a virus that has forced us isolate in our homes. We learned to gather around our computers or phones rather than in person with friends in CHRIST. Now, though, that it is much safer to venture out and to again come together as a congregation, I ponder as to whether some have simply become accustomed to not going to church. I suspect some find it at least as easy to sit at home and watch our services streamed on the internet. Others have simply gotten into the habit of not going to church at all.

The word “congregate,” the root of “congregation,” means “to meet” or “to assemble.” A congregation is a group of people who gather for the purpose of helping one another grow in their faith in JESUS CHRIST. That is what we are familiar and comfortable doing. Or at least it was. Now, for some, new habits must be broken in order that old habits, in this case worshipping with friends and family, can be revived. Yet we may not realize that what we have lost or what has changed is more than just not going to church. It is avoiding those things that help our faith to remain strong and active. Faith is the foundation of our lives and keeps us connected to GOD as Christians. More than that, gathering as a congregation helps us share in the mission of the church, both within, by joining our voices to those others who have come to worship, and without, by sharing our talents and ability in service to others. Just writing this, I can see how easy it would be to say, “Yeah, but so what.” Yet when we recall what the church, the congregation, our friends in CHRIST meant to us before, we may find ourselves missing what we loved and cared about in the past.

If you find yourself among those who have simply gotten comfortable not coming, first of all, know that you are missed. We are better with you than without you. And then, second, remember why it was you used to come to St. Andrew. What made you look forward to being here? What was meaningful for you? What helped you in the week ahead? The church needs you and you need the

church. Let these things bring you back to what you used to know. It won't be long before life at St. Andrew becomes comfortable and familiar again.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey