

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/23/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, January 24, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, as we are confronted with more mass shootings in our country (33 now in the first three weeks of this year), let us pray for an end to this kind of violence. Ask the HOLY SPIRIT to show us answers for providing helpful alternatives for those who turn to this kind of action. Pray that we might find the paths that will keep all people safe.*

Are you woke? Have you ever been accused of being woke?

But what is woke? To be woke means to be aware of the needs of others, to be well-informed about issues, and desiring to make the world a better place for all people. A person who is woke is informed, educated, and conscious of social injustice and prejudices, especially those involving the mistreatment of people based on race, ethnicity, or racial identity.

The term “woke” has been co-opted and is used today as a pejorative to suppress those whose ideas or values differ from your own. If someone says that you’re being woke, it tends to make you become defensive and, more often than not, stop talking about your values. Honestly, calling someone “woke” is a way of bullying that person into moving away from issues that they feel are important.

So, was JESUS woke? Well, read again what it means to be woke and then think about what you know about JESUS. With whom did HE associate and to whom did HE minister? How were the things HE valued and raised up perceived by other in HIS day? I suspect that, were the term available then, JESUS would have been accused by a number of people in that time of being “woke.”

Sometimes, it's unfortunate and a problem when the meaning of words are changed by how they are used. I remember being confused when “bad” came to mean “good.” But it also meant “bad.” So, if you had a “bad” car, that was either a good thing or a bad thing. JESUS told Nicodemus that one had to be “born again,” that is, “born again of water and the SPIRIT.” Sounds like baptism, doesn't it? Now that phrase refers to a religious experience where the individual makes a decision to believe in JESUS. According to JESUS, all who believe and are baptize are “born again.” But today, many of us who are baptized believers don't use the phrase because of what it has come to mean. The same is true for “evangelical.” We are part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The word, “evangelical,” means committed to the Christian gospel message that JESUS CHRIST is the SAVIOR of humanity. To be “evangelical” means literally, “gospeling,” or spreading the gospel of JESUS CHRIST. Yet, now it is primarily understood as referring to the more conservative portion of the Christian church that tends to take a literal interpretation of the Bible. Often this literal interpretation is used as the basis for determining who is really a Christian and who is not. But that doesn't fit with who we as ELCA Lutherans are.

When words get co-opted, we tend to quit using them, unless it benefits us to do so. We avoid these terms because it might link us to those whose values or priorities are not our own. Again, that's unfortunate because these terms can be rich with meaning. I think that, rather than avoiding these words, we should seek to reclaim them by explaining their true meaning, and then discussing how their current usage short-changes the importance of their original intent. I think we should use these terms for ourselves but do so by helping others to understand what we mean when we say them. So, having written all this, let me just say, “I am a born again, evangelical Christian. And, I try to be woke.”

In CHRIST'S love,

Pastor Jeffrey