

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 2/27/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, February 28 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who are being impacted by the severe weather that is happening across our nation and in the world. Pray for protecting and support for those who are at risk. Ask for GOD to bring favorable weather to all places and to watch over all who may be in peril.*

Do you believe there is a devil?

Yesterday in worship, we heard how JESUS was tempted by the devil. We also didn't have slides in worship making it more difficult for people to follow along and participate in the service. Did the devil make those slides disappear so that we didn't have them to negatively impact our worship? I don't know. But I do know that the devil will use occurrences like this to tempt us away from our worship of GOD.

When we gather to worship, there should be two primary purposes. First, we come to praise GOD in gratitude for the many ways GOD has blessed us in life. Second, we come to receive what GOD offers to us for faith development and our life in the week ahead. But things like the absence of slides and variation in the service can be occasions for the devil to tempt us away from worship. The devil can use them to get us thinking about things that we might dislike or to focus on the things we want, rather than being open to what GOD will give, even when things are not perfect (perfect, which you can read as, "not the way I want them).

Consider all the things that may enter into our minds which can tempt us away from the real reasons we come to worship. Why don't we have slides? I wonder who messed this up? How am I supposed to sing when I don't have the words? Why is the temperature not right? Why are there so many songs? Why are we singing this/these songs? Why are the songs so long? Why are the songs so short? Why is the service so long? Why is the service so short? Why is the pastor talking about that? The list could go on and on.

It is these kinds of thoughts that the devil uses to tempt us from real worship. It is our attention on what we want or expect that prevents us from being open to what GOD brings. Rather than just coming to offer what we can and to gratefully receive what GOD is sharing, we let the temptation to focus on other things steal those blessings from us.

The Book of Job speaks of GOD placing a hedge of protection around Job and his family to guard them from the devil. (I don't know what it is about greenery that keeps the devil out. Perhaps I'm being too literal.) We would do well to ask GOD for such protection before we come to worship. We should ask for our hearts to be open to whatever it is that GOD has to offer and to do our best to resist the temptation to look for fault in worship. Remember that the things we may not like are also things that others may find of value. Our gift of charity extended to what others may desire or need in worship can help us to overcome the temptations of the devil and to discover the many blessings that GOD brings to us. And when we feel those temptations that pull our focus away from our worship, it can be helpful to repeat JESUS' words, "Get behind me, Satan."

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey