

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 3/10/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

When I meet someone who says that they don't believe in GOD, I'll ask the person to tell me about the GOD they don't believe in. So far, every time someone has shared about the GOD they don't believe in, I've been able to say, "I don't believe in that GOD either." Usually, that opens the door then for some conversation about the GOD I believe the Bible tells us about. And often, that creates some interest in this GOD as opposed to the ONE they thought the Bible talked about.

Wednesday when driving to St. Andrew for our Lenten soup supper and worship, we passed a man on a street corner holding a sign that said, "JESUS SAVES FROM HELL." You don't know how much I wanted to stop and talk to him. I like talking with people who indicate that they have a firm position on theological issues, like hell. (Sometime, I'll have to write something about hell for us.)

I wanted to ask him what he believed about hell. I wanted to find out where he got his ideas about what hell was like and if he was focused just on our final destination. I wanted to point out to him that JESUS said very little about eternity and a lot about life here and now. And I wanted to wonder with him about why some folks spend so much time thinking about the life after this one and so little on the one we live in currently. I think it's important consider how GOD wants us to experience life now in this time and place, at least as much as we think about the life to come.

When the rich young man came to JESUS and asked HIM, "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?" in Matthew 19, JESUS talks to him about living in this life. First, JESUS tells him to keep all the commandments. The man says that he has kept all of them. Rather than debating whether he really has followed all of them all of his life (None of us have, and deep down, he knows it.), JESUS says "sell all your possessions and give to the poor." JESUS response isn't a condemnation of wealth and it's not about earning your way into heaven. It's about getting rid of those things that keep us from fully living life now in the way that GOD wants us to. For this young man, that was shedding his wealth because being rich was getting in the way of experience the kind of life he could be having now with his neighbors and with GOD.

When JESUS tells the woman caught in adultery to "go and sin no more," HE'S telling her to change the choices she had been making that were keeping her from living a life that was free from control and guilt. She was either cheating on her husband, or helping a man to cheat on his wife, or both. JESUS is telling her that her life can be better and more meaningful and joyful than that.

When JESUS went to the home of Zacchaeus for dinner, the result was that Zacchaeus, who was not liked for the way he overtaxed his neighbors, announced that he had changed. He was going to pay back anyone he had cheated four times what he had taken and that he was going to give half his wealth to the poor. I really want to know what that conversation over dinner was all about!

Over and over, the encounters that JESUS has with people are done with the goal of making life better for them now. This is what JESUS wants for all of us. Because JESUS knows that the more we align our lives with GOD'S will, the better will be our lives now. And that, in turn, will lead to the kind of relationship with GOD that will carry on to eternity. Yes, JESUS SAVES FROM HELL, but the

salvation HE offers rescues us from the hells we choose for ourselves in this life and frees us to live in the joy and grace GOD wants for all of us. Not just in the future, but in this life, here and now.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey