

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 3/20/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, March 21 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for peace, calm, and understanding in our country. Ask that GOD elevate the voice of reason and consideration. Pray that the HOLY SPIRIT raise up faithful and courageous individuals who will calmly challenge those words and actions that demean and bring discord.*

Hate is on the rise. We hear about it. We see it. It is increasing all around us.

There was a time when people would simply disagree with each other. That disagreement led to conversations and debates about different perspectives on the issue. Sometimes, it would even become a bit heated. Rarely, though, did it ever become violent. That's because each person was intitled to their own opinion.

Now, it seems, that if you don't agree with another position, you are the enemy. And you are hated. And you need to stop talking about your views. To stop you, you may called names. Efforts will be made to intimidate you into silence. Others may be encouraged to join in the hate. You have to be stopped.

Hate can lead to fear. If you have a different opinion, it's not just your ideas that are dangerous. You are dangerous. And you have to be stopped. Fear can lead to violence.

In response to hate, many choose to remain silent. No one wants that language, that anger, directed at them. Most just try to slip away and not be connected to the attacks, even if and especially if you agree with the one being attacked. Unless it is something you are passionate about, it's better just to be quiet and hope that you can avoid any confrontation.

I'm not just talking about politics, though politics has certainly become center stage for hatred to be on display. There are many social issues that are debated today, but instead of thoughtful, let-me-try-to-understand-your-side conversation, the labels come out and the hatred quickly rises to the surface. And many of those social issues soon become political issues.

It's uncomfortable and it's scary.

The Bible tells us that GOD is love. The opposite of hate.

GOD is love, and whoever abides in love abides in GOD, and GOD abides in him. – I John 4:16

If we are to truly follow GOD, to love GOD, then we need to become the voices for love. We need to demonstrate love in a world bent on showing hate. We need to speak out when we see hate. We need to demonstrate love to others, even when and especially when they are people we don't like, don't agree with, don't want to be around.

This is the call that JESUS gives to HIS followers. And it's not just implied. It's pretty clear. In Matthew 4:43-45, JESUS says: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and*

hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your FATHER who is in heaven.’” I’d like to say that this will be something easy for us to do, but it won’t be. (That’s why JESUS included the “those who persecute you” part.) But it is something our world needs and is the thing that makes us (or should make us) different than the rest of the world. Hate is on the rise. But we don’t need to let it be.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey