

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 4/10/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, April 11 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for an end to bullying behavior and language. Ask that the HOLY SPIRIT guide people toward greater tolerance and openness to differences in people. Pray for those who suffer bullying and that it not affect negatively their sense of self as a person of tremendous value.*

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My oldest daughter, Talitha, is on the autism spectrum. She is extremely high functioning and her difficulties are fairly limited, but there are some. She has dysgraphia, which is like dyslexia, only with writing instead of reading, and she has some ticks. One of these is sniffing as though she has a runny nose, though she doesn't. It can understandably be a bit annoying at times, but we understand that she can't help it or control it. It is who she is.

When Talitha was in sixth grade, her math teacher was quite irritated by Talitha's tick. He would tell her to stop (which she can't) and would call her out in class for the behavior, which gave permission for some of her classmates to bully her for the tick. My wife sent a note to the teacher, explaining the situation, and asking for his tolerance and support for Talitha, but to no avail. Finally, I was asked to come in and meet with the teacher and the principal.

During the conversation, I shared information about Talitha's condition and that it was beyond her control to stop the noise. I expressed my awareness of the distraction it could cause as we had dealt with it at home for many years. And I explained that it simply is who she is and she cannot change that.

The teacher refused to accept this and insisted that she stop the noise as it was particularly distracting during the weekly quizzes that he gave.

I tried again to explain that Talitha is unable to stop and I tried to create some understanding by suggesting that it would be like asking a man who has five o'clock shadow to stop his beard from growing.

This teacher did indeed have heavier facial growth and immediately became defensive. He exclaimed that he couldn't change this and that it was who he was.

I said that this was exactly the point and that, in the same way that he couldn't stop his beard from growing, Talitha can't stop her tick from occurring.

Suddenly he seemed to comprehend the circumstances differently and our conversation shifted to how we might address the situation in a positive way. Since the primary time the tick was a problem was during the quizzes, I offered to come get her on Fridays during the quiz and remove her from the class, and he agreed to allow Talitha to take her quiz after school. This seemed to alleviate the problem in the class and gave me the benefit of some extra time with Talitha each week.

Lately there have been a number of laws proposed and, in some cases, passed to restrict the behavior of certain people. And it seems that there is an assumption that these "objectionable" behaviors are

simply a choice by the individuals and that they should stop. Such attempts to block these actions by people in many cases denies who these people are, and really who GOD has created them to be. Indeed, there are some behaviors that are a choice, but there are also many that come naturally for who a person is. Asking them to stop would be like asking you to adopt some behavior that complete goes against who you are as a person, who, again, GOD created you to be. Consider that for a moment if there are practices by people that you find objectionable and ask yourself if you could switch to that behavior for even just a week? In the same you might find such a suggestion repugnant, so it is for the other person who is being challenged to be something they are not.

We need to recognize that GOD has made great diversity in creation. No one is the same and we need to acknowledge the uniqueness of each individual. When we try to control the innate actions of others, even if they are not what the majority does, we are denying GOD'S creation and its multiplicity. Rather than seeking to make everybody be like we want them to be, we need to make the effort to better understand who someone that differs from is and to accept that difference as part of who GOD made them to be.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey