

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 4/24/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, April 25 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for Church. Ask GOD that we might become more unified by what we have in common, our believe in GOD'S love in JESUS CHRIST, and less focused on our differences. Pray that our love for GOD leads the church to show GOD'S love to all people unconditionally.*

During the first 250 of Christianity, the focus of the early church was on teaching about behavior. Paul, in particular, wrote much about the activities from which Christians should abstain as well as encouraging those actions that promote growth in development as faith followers of CHRIST. This conduct would not only help the believer to grow closer to CHRIST, but also serve as a witness to those around her or him.

In 312, Constantine, the emperor of the Roman Empire became a believer. From that time on Rome was no longer polytheistic (open to the belief in many different gods), and instead worshiped only the one GOD. That meant that everyone in the empire was now Christian, whether you wanted to be or not, and whether you even knew it or not. This was the beginning of what we call the Holy Roman Empire where religion and government became one-in-the-same.

But if the entire empire was Christian, it also become important that everyone believed the same things about GOD. A number of Christians had been using what came to be known as the "Old Roman Creed," but in the mid-300s, that Creed was honed down to what we call the Apostles' Creed. The final version of this Creed, the form that we use in worship, was arrived at in the fifth to sixth century. The primary focus of the Apostles' Creed was to teach about GOD as a Trinity, one GOD in three persons.

However, confusion over what this mean continued, particularly with regard to JESUS. Was HE GOD, or was HE a human who was taken over or possessed, if you will, by GOD who left HIM at the crucifixion. Many could not believe that GOD actually died on the cross. So, Constantine called together a conference of church leaders at Nicaea in 325 to develop a statement of faith and, in particular, to clarify what the Church believed about JESUS. The result was the Nicene Creed that states the JESUS CHRIST was "begotten from the FATHER." Begotten isn't a word we use much but the present tense "beget" means to bring a child into existence through sexual relations, or to "give rise to or bring about." This second meaning is closer to what they were trying to say in the Nicene Creed, but the Creed is more trying to communicate that JESUS is GOD and comes from GOD. This was still confusing, so in the sixth century the Church tried again and developed the Athanasian Creed that is about five times as long as the Nicene Creed. (Be glad we don't say this one on Sundays.)

The point I wanted to make, though, is that the Church has become much more focused on "believing" rather than "being," on "doctrine" instead of "doing." Yet, though JESUS did talk some about what to believe, much of HIS teaching and actions were centered on how to live as people of GOD. Stories like the Good Samaritan, or the Sower, or the Rich Fool get at how we are to live in relationship to others. HIS actions toward tax collectors and prostitutes and others who were on the fringe of society say a great deal about how we are to treat those who people tend to reject. Knowing what we believe is important, but if we never go further by putting that belief into action, we have missed what was

central to JESUS' life among us—one of welcome and service to all people because of GOD'S love for all people.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey