

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 4/7/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

What do you mean when you say “GOD”?

Think about that for a moment.

And then consider, do others understand “GOD” the same way you do when speaking about GOD? I know I assume that we all understand GOD the same way when I write, or preach, or converse about GOD. But maybe we don't.

When I stop and reflect on this, I know that some people think of GOD as vengeful and punishing. For some, GOD'S judgmental nature is only directed to others who don't believe or live as they do. For others, especially those who have tremendous guilt over decision made in the past, GOD is always a GOD of judgment and will exact eternal punishment on them for those “bad” choices. Others I know only see GOD as a provider of grace and forgiveness for everyone. Most probably fall somewhere in between those two extremes.

The truth is that mostly what I know about GOD is how little I really know about GOD. But that's also what motivates me to study and converse with others so that I can hopefully better know and understand GOD and GOD'S will for me.

Looking at the Bible, at least in a superficial way, is not always helpful. Or a literal one, for that matter either. GOD creates everything, but GOD also destroys in a flood. GOD punishes, but GOD also forgives. GOD gives direct instruction, but GOD is also distant. How can we know what to believe about GOD?

The Creeds that we say in church were and are one way we to try to capture what we can/should believe about GOD, FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT. It's interesting that for the first two hundred or so years of Christianity, most teaching was on what to do as Christians. Then, after Emperor Constantine became Christians (and thereby so did everyone else in the empire whether they knew it or wanted to), the focus became on what to believe as Christians.

But how much can we know about GOD and who GOD is?

JESUS, in John 14:9, says to Philip, “*Anyone who has seen ME has seen the FATHER.*” JESUS is assuring us that we can know who GOD is by looking at and studying JESUS—what HE says and what HE does. We believe that JESUS is GOD incarnate—made flesh. GOD became human in JESUS, so what JESUS says and what HE does, especially with those who the society of HIS time rejected, can teach us a lot about GOD. It is through JESUS that we can come most close in knowing GOD.

On this Good Friday, as we contemplate JESUS willing sacrifice of HIMSELF on the cross for us, we would do well to pause and ask ourselves, “What do these events, what does JESUS death (and on Sunday, resurrection) teach me about GOD? What can I know about GOD and GOD'S feelings and relationship with me and all people because of the cross?” If you want to know who GOD is, the best place to look begins with JESUS and the cross.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey