

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/8/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, May 9, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray again for an end to gun violence. Ask GOD to help bring about the termination of the loss of life through the use of guns. Pray that we develop healthier ways of dealing with anger than using guns and that we find commonsense methods of reducing gun violence in our land.*

Our society does a lot of name-calling. When people are angry, they call other people names, unconsciously attempting to diminish the other person and in order to feel better about themselves. For some, name-calling has even become an “art(?)” with great thought put into derogatory names that seek to ridicule or demean another.

When Martin Luther became angry with someone, his name of choice to call that person was “beggar.” That sounds odd, but Luther did it to help himself quickly get over his hostility. Luther, feeling the need to attack the person, at least in his own mind, used the word “beggar” to suggest that this target was someone who need to beg CHRIST for forgiveness for their offensive words or behavior. But in calling them a beggar, Luther also reminded himself that he also was someone who need CHRIST’S mercy. Suddenly, he was no better than the other and both (and all for that matter) were sinful beings dependent upon GOD’S grace in CHRIST JESUS. It would quickly help him to move past his resentments of the other.

The church council of St. Andrew this year is reading and discussing together the book, If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to Get Out of the Boat, by John Ortberg. In the eighth chapter, Ortberg talks about developing a focus on JESUS in our lives. He even suggests several ideas for doing this including having an empty chair at the table at mealtime to remind you of the presence of CHRIST, keeping a picture of CHRIST or a cross or a scripture passage in a place where you will see it as you’re going to sleep, or talking to JESUS when you’re trying to solve a problem rather than talking to yourself.

I’ve been trying another suggestion from John Ortberg that, while it has helped me to have greater focus on JESUS, has also had the additional benefit that Luther found in calling others “beggar.” Ortberg’s suggestion is when in social settings, quietly whisper “GOD” or “JESUS” when you glance at each person. Ortberg says it’s a practice of double-vision that CHRIST does, seeing each person as she or he is, but also seeing the person as CHRIST wants her or him to be.

What I have found is that following this practice has helped me to see people differently and recognizing each person as one of GOD’S own children by calling them JESUS when I glance at them. It also has some humorous effects when I follow this practice with someone who has irritated or angered me. It’s hard to be upset when I see CHRIST in the other. And it’s also funny when I call the person who just cut me off JESUS, because my next thought is, “Wait. JESUS wouldn’t have cut me off.” Nevertheless, I still recognize that this person is a creation of GOD, and I can say a quick prayer asking that GOD might help them to become more who GOD wants them to be. I try to do that without also thinking about what I think that would look like. That’s between the other and GOD. And I then find myself thinking more about who GOD wants me to be, which sometimes leads me to commit myself to changes that might bring me closer to that hoped for person.

Focusing on JESUS is a goal that I believe might be worthwhile for all of us. JESUS has said that when we seek to serve others, especially those who are least (or who don't live the way we think they should), we are serving HIM. Making the effort to see CHRIST in each person, or at least calling them JESUS can help us to change the way we treat others as well as helping us to keep our attention on the ONE who has done so much for us. Let me encourage you to give this a try and see what happens in your life.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey