

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/26/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, June 27 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the families who lost their loved ones in the Titanic submersible tragedy as well as the families of the 81 immigrants who drowned off the coast of Greece. Pray for comfort to those who mourn. Also pray for the hundreds still missing from that ferry and that rescue efforts might reach and save them.*

Our daughter, Rebekah, is serving as a SAM to a congregation in North Carolina. A SAM is a Synodically Authorized Minister. This means that, though Rebekah is not yet ordained, she can serve for all intents-and-purposes as the pastor of that congregation, preaching and presiding over the administration of the sacraments. The SAM program can benefit congregations that are unable to pay an ordained minister, or that are in an area where there are few ordained ministers available for call.

Yesterday, Rebekah told me of the Children's Message she had given that morning in church she is serving. She began by asking the children about playing Simon Says. (If you don't know the game, the leader tells the children to perform an action, like stand on one foot or jump up and down. If the instruction is not preceded by the words, "Simon says," they are to ignore the directive. If it is given with, "Simon says," and they fail to do the action, or if it does not have those first words and they do the action anyway, they are eliminated from the game.) Rebekah was using this game to then talk about how the gospel can be a bit confusing at times trying figure out what we're supposed to or not supposed to do. Rebekah said that this confusion was true even for her and especially when you're trying to read the Gospel in Greek.

One of the kids immediately said, "The Bible was written in Greek??!!!"

Rebekah then explained the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek, and neither of those are always completely accurate in what we read today in our English translations. She said that this is why when reading the Gospels, sometimes it's like Simon Says, because it can be hard to know what JESUS is asking and telling us due to all the different ways to read the Bible.

Her little interactive guy spoke up and said, "I know Greek," and his sister right away said, "No, you don't."

He then kind of smiled and said, "I'm weird."

Rebekah responded, "That's okay, buddy. Me, too."

That's part of what got JESUS into trouble. JESUS didn't always do or say things the way the religious leaders of HIS day said they should be. HE was weird. The religious leaders saw HIM hanging out with people that the Church of HIS day had labeled sinful. Or giving a different interpretation of what GOD expected of people than what they had been saying. Or announcing that people's sins were forgiven (which is something only GOD can do or, more accurately, they claimed only they could do in GOD'S name, but not JESUS). To their mind, JESUS was weird.

Truth be told, we're all little bit weird, at least when others compare things we say, or do, or like to themselves. There will always be some who will run the gamut from mildly disagreeing with us to strongly condemning us because our behavior isn't what they think it should be. But that's okay, because JESUS knows what it is to be labeled weird and even be openly criticized. JESUS, according to some, was weird. Yet, the reason HE came was so that, when people were told or just felt weird (though we sometimes use words like "sinful," or "unlovable," or "unforgiveable" instead of weird), JESUS is there to say, "That's okay, because all of us, even at our weirdest, are always loved by GOD." And that's all that matters.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey