

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 8/11/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

What do you do when the teachings of JESUS are in conflict with your own personal beliefs? The Jewish leaders had HIM arrested and ultimately executed. The Roman leaders ignored HIM until they couldn't. But neither of these groups were people who had made the commitment to follow JESUS and strive to be HIS hands and voice in the world. So, what do you, a disciple, a follower of JESUS, do if HIS words differ from what you believe or want?

The political climate of our country is contributing to new challenges when it comes to following JESUS. And it appears that political beliefs are winning over religious beliefs for a number of people. Russell Moore is an evangelical Christian leader who talked this week about a number of worshippers who have been so affected by the politics of our time that they are even rejecting the teachings of our LORD.

Moore says that multiple pastors from evangelical (theologically conservative) congregations are sharing stories about members of their congregations who are upset when the pastors read from the Bible. In particular, they have become unhappy with JESUS' words from the Sermon on the Mount where HE advocated the behaviors of forgiveness and mercy as central to the Christian faith. "Multiple pastors tell me, essentially, the same story about quoting the Sermon on the Mount, parenthetically, in their preaching—'turning the other cheek'—[and] to have someone come up after to say, 'Where did you get those liberal talking points?'" Moore went on to say, "And what was alarming to me is that in most of these scenarios, when the pastor would say, 'I'm literally quoting JESUS CHRIST,' the response would not be, 'I apologize.' The response would be, 'Yes, but that doesn't work anymore. That's weak.'"

Are the teachings of JESUS negotiable for we who have committed to following HIM? Can we just pick and choose the things that HE says that we like and ignore the rest (though I will admit that there are ways that we do this anyway)? What do you do when the words of JESUS call you to make a change in your beliefs or behaviors that you just don't want to make?

I saw a quote recently from author Anne LaMott that said, "You can safely assume you've created GOD in your own image when it turns out that GOD hates all the same people you do." When we cherry pick the teachings of JESUS that we choose to follow and disregard the ones we don't, we are making JESUS into our image of what we want HIM to be, and dismissing who HE truly is. JESUS came to teach us what GOD wants for creation and for each of us. GOD who created us knows us better than we know ourselves and what it is that will make things more meaningful, more life-giving, and what is best, not just for ourselves but for all of creation. Sometimes that means that we have to recognize that the beliefs to which we hold may have been taught to us by others who misunderstood or misrepresented JESUS' words. That then places us in the position of having to change the views we hold to and that can sometimes be hard. Yet, as Lutherans, we come from a tradition of reforming—or reevaluating what is being taught to see if it says what the Bible really teaches. Again, making such changes can be hard and uncomfortable. But as Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what GOD'S will is—HIS good, pleasing, and perfect will."

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey