

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 8/21/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, August 22 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for all who are affected by the tropical storm that has moved up from the Pacific Ocean. Pray for safety from flooding and sickness. Ask for GOD'S help to those who need assistance. Thank GOD for those who will sacrifice time and resources to help those who are struggling.*

I read a story recently about a congregant who approached his pastor to critique the pastor's preaching. The conversation went like this:

C: You should be preaching more on sin. You need to condemn it.

P: What is your sin? I'll preach on it.

C: No, preach on _____ (naming a particular sin).

P: Is that your sin?

C: No!

P: Why would you want to hear a sermon on someone else's sin?

This conversation reveals several truths that are valuable for all of us to consider. First, many have a tendency to focus on the sins of others. And there are several reasons why we do this. One reason is that we like to rank sins on the basis of how bad we think they are. We have a scale from minor to major sins, from mild to severe. Of course, murder, for example, would be on the "really bad" end of that spectrum. Telling a "white lie" would be at the other end of sin you could practically ignore because they're so insignificant. So, rather than thinking about or debating those tiny, inconsequential sins, let's point out the big ones. Which, by the way, happen to mostly or exclusively be the sins we don't commit. The sins of other folks. Let's talk about, preach about, condemn those sins.

Which leads to another reason to focus on the sins of others because by doing so, we don't really have to look at our own sin. Unless, of course, we're committing the same sin. Fortunately, or so we think though, there are enough sins we don't do that others do that we can point at and thereby overlook and hopefully ignore our own sin. It's helpful for our own piece of mind to look at those who sins are bigger or worse or at least different than ours. In fact, let's not even look at our own. Let's just look at theirs.

A corollary to this is what I call "Opening Night Panic Syndrome." Imagine that you're standing in line to get tickets for the latest really big show on opening night. You know there are only a limited number and you are hoping and praying that you can get those tickets before they run out. And then an usher comes out and starts counting as she moves down the line. And just before she gets to you, she says, "I'm sorry there are only enough tickets for people down to here. There are no tickets for the rest of you." That's it. You're out. You have no chance. Unless...wait a minute...what if you could prove that you are more worthy of those tickets than someone else. Someone who is further up in line and part of the group that will get tickets. You just have to convince the usher or the manager or someone that you should be up there because you're better than one of "those" people. And when we think about heaven this way, we worry that we're just not good enough to get in. That is, unless we can show that someone else is less deserving.

The second truth that conversation between the pastor and church member reveals and that I've already alluded to is that we don't want to look at our own sin. We'd rather talk about the sins of others, so we don't have to admit that we are sinful individuals. We don't want to have to acknowledge that we don't deserve GOD'S blessings in our lives because of who we know we are. And perhaps, in your mind even right now you may be thinking, "Yeah, but at least I'm not as bad as..."

Here are some responses to these truths and reasons I've listed above. First, in GOD'S eyes, sin is sin. There is no scale. If you stray from what GOD wants for you and from you, you are a sinner. And there are a lot of people in the world so I truthfully haven't checked everyone, but frankly, everyone is a sinner. We're all unworthy. We're all out. None of us get in. Except for the grace of GOD that is available through faith. It doesn't matter if you've sinned, or what sins you've committed, or how many. If you believe in GOD, you're in. Now that may bother you a little bit if you realize that this means that some of the people whose lives you don't approve of are also going to get in simply because they have faith. And if you want to try to point out why *they* shouldn't get in, you're back to looking at their sin and not your own, and we don't get to do that. Only GOD does. So, let it go. Also, if you're worried about not getting in because there is a cut off, don't. The Kingdom of GOD is big enough for everyone. As JESUS says, "In my FATHER'S house are many rooms." Enough for everyone who turns to the FATHER. And one more thing. It is worthwhile for us to acknowledge our own sin and the fact that it disqualifies us for GOD'S Kingdom because that leads us to recognize that GOD'S grace takes care of that just because we believe. So, stop looking around at everyone else, if that's what you're doing. Just look at yourself and then look at GOD and realize what GOD has done for you. And then, say, "Thank YOU!"

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey