

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/20/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, November 21, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, give thanks to GOD for the faith you have received through the HOLY SPIRIT. Give thanks for the community of faith into which GOD has placed you at this time. Ask GOD for opportunities to tell other and invite them to come and see what GOD is doing.*

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We know that many of the letters in the New Testament were written to Christian churches in a number of cities in the known world: Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Galatia, and Thessalonica. Many may also know or have sensed without really thinking about it, but none of these churches still exists today. That's right. All of these churches ended up closing.

But I think that it is a testament to GOD'S presence and vision that Christianity continues to exist in the world today. Even though these first churches are no longer "open for business," the faith which they sought to teach is still alive in the world 2,000 years later. Rather than ending when the first churches ceased to function, the Christian faith has continued to spread, encourage, support, and inspire even up through today.

Most of us know churches that have closed. Many know churches that are near to ending their existence as a congregation. And that is sad, especially if we have some history with those former or close-to-ending communities of faith. But though churches come into being and later end as a center for the worship of GOD in JESUS CHRIST, the Christian faith continues.

In Acts 1:8, JESUS told his followers, "...you will be MY witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Now, some of those listeners went to north Africa. Tradition says that Matthew wrote his gospel in Egypt. Others went east from Jerusalem. Thomas went to India and there are more churches in India named for Thomas than anyone besides the Virgin Mary. Still other went north and west. Yet, none of those early believers went all the way to the south of Africa, or Australia, or the Americas. Nevertheless, Christianity has reached all those places—the ends of the earth. We should remember this when we lament the decline or closing of churches today. GOD is still active in the world and the message of grace and unconditional love still continues to be shared.

GOD'S vision for churches, past, present, and future, is not primarily to make sure that they keep going, that they continue to stay open. That is a secondary goal to the primary one that CHRIST gave us: to be HIS witnesses. We do that as best as we are able, for as long as we can. We support other congregations in doing the same. And then, if and when the time comes, we entrust that vision to others, knowing that GOD'S plan will continue. Christianity has faced persecution, controversy, and more throughout its history, but GOD has and continues to bless it that more and more people might know about GOD'S love in JESUS CHRIST and come to believe. We are a part of that history for whatever period of time GOD blesses us to be. That is our mission. It is to this, to telling others, that JESUS has called us.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey