

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/24/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

One of the reasons that we sometimes make poor decisions is because we don't have all the information we need, and more importantly, the right information. I think the main reason that happens is because we ask the wrong questions and asking the wrong question results in getting the wrong answers.

For example, I'm often asked, "How big is your church?" Now, that question assumes something that is not always true, and more importantly, is not the information that the questioner more likely wants to know. "How big?" presumes that bigger is better. Certainly, bigger churches may have more programs than smaller ones, but it imagines that big-ness also means "success," and again, this is not necessarily true. It has been said that many megachurches are "a mile wide and an inch deep," meaning that they have lots of members, but they are not doing much to lead those people into discipleship—real discipleship, where faith is lived out daily rather than just something that is done for an hour on Sunday. So "how big?" isn't actually providing the information one might truly want.

I think the better question to ask is not about size but about ministry: "What is GOD doing in your church and through your church?" The answer to this question will give you a lot more information and accurate information about what is really happening in a congregation. It will tell you about service and people and worship and vision and possibility, and isn't that what one really wants to know?

In his book, Wait, What? And Life's Other Essential Questions, James E. Ryan offers what he believes are the five most important questions we should ask to get good answers. The one that I find most intriguing and valuable is, "Can't we at least agree that...?" This is a question that can bring people together. It finds common ground for work instead of focusing on the wide gap between disparate positions. Imagine what might happen if someone in Congress stood up and said, "Can't we at least agree that...health care in America could be improved?" "Or that...gun violence is a problem?" "Or that...we continue to become more divided than united?" Once everyone agrees on a shared beginning point, then comes the opportunity to ask another question, "What might it look like if...?" and to begin working to arrive at a solution to the agreed upon problem.

A challenge in asking the right questions is to learn to look outward rather than inward. Whenever we approach election seasons, I think questions are important. Often the questions that are raised are about me: "Has this elected official done what I wanted?" "Will this bill make my life better?" As Christians who are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, there's a question that I believe better gets at the heart of what we need to know in choosing the candidates and deciding on the issues: "Is my neighbor better off now than s/he was two years, or four years, or six years ago?" This is an outward-looking question that encourages us to consider the needs of others rather than just our own?

JESUS often asked questions as a way of helping people to look at their own lives in relationship to GOD. "Do you want to be healed?" (John 5:6) "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" (Matthew 6:25) "If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (Luke 16:11) "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29) It can be a valuable exercise to read the gospels and pause whenever you come to a question, especially if asked

by JESUS. Then take a moment to consider the question as if JESUS were asking you. Your answers to the questions of JESUS just might give you the information you are looking for.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey