

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/26/2024

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

What do you do when you discover in scripture something different from what you've been told, from what you believed the Bible says? What do you do when you're confronted with a different interpretation of the message of scripture than you've been led to believe in the past? Not because of anything you've done incorrectly. Simply because what you're reading differs from what you were taught or heard from sources that had fostered an incorrect understanding either through confusion or from a desire to use scripture to control certain other groups. What do you do?

Martin Luther had been taught and believed that forgiveness from GOD had to be earned, either through good works or by purchasing it with money. Upon discovering the promise of forgiveness through faith alone rather than through self-accomplishment, Luther turned first to his trusted mentors and then to the academic community in which he lived and worked. His discussions with other professors and students led to the publication of his thoughts, though without his permission. This eventually triggered the Protestant Reformation and gave rise to the Lutheran Church and other denominations.

Rachel Held Evans, author of *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*, the book our Church Council is reading and discussing, began to question the teachings of her church which read the Bible literally and suppressed women and others. Her ponderings about the Bible were often met with messages to "stop asking questions and just accept what you've been told." She continued to explore scripture, including spending a year trying to live a Biblical lifestyle literally. She eventually left her denomination and launched a new career of writing columns and blogs leading to her first book, *Evolving in Monkey Town, How a Girl Who Knew All the Answers Learned to Ask the Questions*. Rachel Held Evans and her husband, Dan Evans, co-founded the Evolving Faith Conference, an annual gathering of progressive Christians who explore the questions young people are asking today.

When people encounter challenges to what they believe they will choose different avenues. Some will simply deny any new teaching. Some will just go away or go elsewhere. Others will dig in deeper, seeking to reconcile what they've been taught with the rest of scripture so that they might find the truth of what GOD wants for all of GOD's children. Those who continue to ask questions often discover a deeper relationship with GOD and a new understanding of faith that launches them into greater mission and ministry, sharing what they have found. For Luther, it was (unintentionally) a new denomination that sought to tell the world the message of GOD's unconditional grace. For Evans, it was a desire to help others who also have questions to find answers that better connect them to GOD. Studying the Bible can be exciting but challenging as we come to understand GOD's mission and purpose in ways that can launch us into new adventures as part of the Kingdom of GOD.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey