

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 2/12/2024

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, February 13 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for children in our world. Ask GOD to look with favor upon the young ones, granting through parents and others the care they need and deserve. Pray that as they grow, they know that they are loved by GOD and have tremendous value and purpose in our world.*

I recently started reading a book by Ched Myers titled Binding the Strong Man, first published in 1988. The book is described as “a political reading of Mark’s story of JESUS.” As I have been journeying through the book, it has brought back several parts of my seminary training, pieces of biblical study that are important as we think about what the Bible says. Among these tools for the study of the Bible is one known as the historical-critical method. Some traditions reject this tool including the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). The use of the historical-critical method was one of the key issues, along with the ordination of women, that led to their rejection of joining the merger that created the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The historical-critical method looks at what was going on at the time and place that it happened rather than taking everything the Bible says literally in its application today. By understanding the original context of a writing, we can better discern what the words meant for those readers. This then helps us to know what to apply specifically to our time and what to consider instead as guidelines for thinking about our time. We are not under the occupation of a foreign government as were the people of JESUS’ day, so some of what JESUS said does not directly relate to our context. We do not follow Temple worship nor do most of our congregation of us live in a land inhabited primarily by herders or farmers. Still, what JESUS said in that context allows us to think about what it might mean for us. It leads us to ask, “What would JESUS have said about our time? What would HE have challenged or blessed?” Then there are other things to which the Bible speaks that have just as much meaning today as they did then.

For example, the Romans believed that you didn’t become emperor if you were not a god. They followed a practice called “emperor worship” viewing the emperor as a god among many gods. We don’t live under the authority of an emperor in our country today, so some of what the Bible says that condemns the worship of false gods, human-made gods, includes the worship of their political rulers. Nevertheless, those words can serve as a warning for our time not to make political leaders more than they are, nor to, in a sense, worship them nor follow their guidance when it opposes those things that GOD calls us to do.

Much of what the Bible seems to say about women comes from a time that was much more patriarchal. Women were seen as the property of their fathers or husbands. It was not socially permitted for women to be able to function in ways that were equal to men. King James I, when he commissioned an English translation of the Bible, insisted that his translators embrace several points of emphasis including the superiority of men over women. The use of the King James version even up through today has contributed to the subjugation of women. Yet, there are parts of the Bible that clearly show that GOD intended equality between men and women and there are places where GOD even favors the witness of women over men. Without considering the historical context, many will choose those passages that favor their desired structure for society even now.

How we interpret the Bible continues to be a source of division in the Christian church today. Often, our interpretation is influenced by the result that we want. In seeking our desired outcome, though, we too often reject what GOD intended. Martin Luther challenged the Roman Catholic’s understanding that the source of forgiveness is the Church which can, if it wishes, even sell this forgiveness. This concept was stressed at a time when the Church needed money to finish some major building projects. Yet Luther’s study led him to question

this teaching of GOD's intent based on scripture. And look where that led. In our interpretation of the words of the Bible, we must seek to discover what GOD intended and not always take what we read at face value.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey