

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 4/29/2024

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, April 30 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for doctors, physician's assistants, nurses, and other medical personnel who care for those who are sick. Thank GOD for their commitment to the healing of others. Pray for the SPIRIT's guidance as they care for the infirm.*

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The City of Long Beach just completed a public works project in our neighborhood, replacing the curbs on the corners with specially designed ramps. It served as a reminder that we live in a very different world than JESUS. Not because of sidewalks, curbs, automobiles, and the like. But because of our whole attitude toward people with infirmities. We have laws that require a certain number of special parking places in parking lots for people with disabilities. When we go to the theater, individuals sign the entire performance for hearing-impaired people. St. Andrew has several shortened pews to allow people in wheelchairs to sit beside their family members.

We don't think of these things as unusual. They are what we do to accommodate those who have physical challenges. But these accommodations would never have happened in JESUS' world. And JESUS' response to that is part of what got HIM into so much trouble.

We forget that JESUS' society viewed disability very differently than we do. Sickness and physical infirmity were understood to be punishments from GOD. If you had a malady, it was undoubtedly because you had done something to anger GOD. You had displeased GOD and were getting the consequences of your sin. These people were criticized and shunned. Often, you became an outcast from society. Further, because of your obvious sinful behavior, you were not permitted to enter into the worship services of GOD's House. (I wonder how many today take going to the worship of GOD for granted rather than seeing it as an opportunity and gift to be received regularly and joyfully.)

What did JESUS do about these afflicted people though? HE healed them. Often by touching them, making HIM unclean in the eyes of the Temple. Except after HE touched them and they were healed, wouldn't that mean they were no longer unclean? Instead of joining in the ostracizing of people so clearly punished by GOD, JESUS restored them to their families and society by making them well.

At the very least, for the religious leaders anyway, this was very confusing. Only GOD can heal, or one who has GOD's authority and power. Yet JESUS was healing those whom GOD was supposedly punishing. Sometimes HE did it on the Sabbath. Sometimes HE even did it in the synagogue. Blasphemy! The regular people had a different view. They rejoiced when a neighbor was returned to the community. They celebrated when GOD's power was used for the lowly and the outcast, the ones who the religious leaders said didn't deserve it. JESUS offered a different understanding of who GOD was and is, and how GOD feels about people, despite what the priests, Pharisees, and scribes said. And those religious leaders didn't like it, so they decided to get rid of JESUS.

Think about today. Maybe even yourself. Do you have ailments that in JESUS' time would lead you to be condemned? Do you have ongoing conditions that would have been labeled as punishment from GOD? Do you receive accommodations that help you remain involved in society rather than being outcast? When we read the Bible, we forget or fail to realize that physical ailment was viewed very differently in JESUS' time. Helping people to remain active in community and family was not even a consideration. Yet it is exactly what GOD wants. New ramped curbs, people who sign, special seating and parking are all ways that we mirror what JESUS was doing. JESUS sought to restore people to a fuller life. These efforts that we almost take for

granted today reflect GOD's desires for all people. We can rejoice when we see these accommodations or can use them in our situations knowing that these are indeed blessings from GOD.

In CHRIST's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey