

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/10/2024

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

We know that JESUS had compassion for the sick and suffering. Often, HE healed people and by doing so, HE restored them to their family and community. Wholeness was part of what JESUS offered to those who were infirmed through HIS miraculous acts of healing.

JESUS, though, was also challenging the church of HIS time, the Temple by HIS acts of compassion. The Temple played a significant role in determining how the sick were treated. Before someone with a visible disease could return to their life before illness, they had to show themselves to the local priests to be declared “clean.” The Temple “administrated” who was acceptable before GOD and who wasn’t. This happened in part through the required rituals for those who were ill. when you came to worship certain requirements revealed who was acceptable and who was not. These requirements, rather than celebrating GOD’s blessings that brought wholeness, served to burden people and bring more money for the Temple.

Women, during their menstrual period, could not attend worship because they were unclean. Then, when their period was over, they had to make an offering to GOD to make themselves acceptable again. And the Temple through the local synagogues collected that offering.

Lepers, once healed, had to show themselves to the local priests to be declared clean. And, of course, there would be an offering that had to be made. Because of their leprosy, these folks had been unable to work and have income. Yet, before they could be declared cleansed, they had to make the offering. So, before you can work, you had to be certified as healed, but to be certified, you had to make an offering even though you had no money. Instead of helping people to return to family and neighbors, the Temple made it more difficult.

And JESUS objected to this—big time.

When JESUS healed on the Sabbath, HE was violating the laws that said you can’t work on the Sabbath. (What better way to show GOD’s love than through healing?) More than this, however, HE was challenging the power of the Temple to control people’s lives by doing many of HIS healings in the synagogue, right in front of the people who could see that the person was now well, without an offering having been made. And the religious leaders didn’t like this.

The Church should always be in the business of helping to restore relationships. It should do all that it can to help people be in healthy community with others and, of course, with GOD. When the Church sets up barriers that keep people out or makes hurdles that people must overcome to be a part of GOD’s Kingdom, the Church has put its own power and self-interests ahead of GOD’s. JESUS got into trouble because HE did things that made it easier for people to be accepted and acknowledged as loved by GOD. HE did it because the Church, the Temple, had made rules and the control of people more important than the love of GOD for all people. We should always be asking if there are things we are doing that make it harder for people to have access to GOD and to GOD’s people. And if we find that we are, we need to remove those obstacles.

In CHRIST's love,

Pastor Jeffrey