

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 7/8/2024
GOD Hasn't Changed

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, July 9 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for all who are or will be impacted by Hurricane Beryl and for those who provide relief. Ask that GOD use people effectively to provide shelter, medical assistance, and needed resources to assist all who are in need.

We live in a post-pandemic world, and many feel things should be how they were before the pandemic. But they aren't. And they never will be. The pandemic affected our world, in some cases irreversibly. We will always have COVID with us, though certainly not in the number of cases we saw during the pandemic. But our world continues to live with the effects of COVID.

We are experiencing high inflation. So is the rest of the world. The United States is fortunate we have lower inflation than 106 other countries. The lowest inflation is in East Asia and the Pacific Islands. Knowing this doesn't remove our struggles, but it helps to put things in perspective. The United States has avoided a recession due to the work of the government and especially the Federal Reserve. Still, one-third of the world will be in recession in the coming year. The situations in these stressed countries will have an impact on us due to trade, travel, and other considerations.

Though we are not required to wear masks or keep social distance any longer, we are a more isolated society. We are still more cautious around others. We often choose electronic forms of communication rather than in-person, in part because of convenience, but also for safety reasons. A quarter of U.S. students are chronically absent from school. That figure was about 13% before the pandemic. We don't gather as freely as we did previously.

Even our churches still experience a decline in attendance from pre-pandemic times. While there are some whose health or living situations have changed since before the pandemic, many have chosen not to return to their home church. Some few have decided to attend a different church for various reasons. Many though have simply quit going to praise GOD in a place of worship.

I'm sorry if this all seems doom and gloom. Still, I think it is important for us to recognize the reality of our world rather than thinking we are in the same world as before. Things change, and since the pandemic they certainly have. We need the help and support of each other as we look toward the future.

But there is one thing that has not changed. That is the love and grace of GOD. GOD has not nor will ever change. GOD still loves all people unconditionally, especially as shown in the life, death, and resurrection of JESUS the CHRIST. GOD seeks and desires to have a close relationship with each of us. It depends on what we want. GOD still gives us that freedom. Assembling with other Christians provides us with some of what we've lost recently. In our gatherings, we find community, encouragement, comfort, and support. We find opportunities to share those important things with others, increasing our sense of purpose. Most of all, in Christian community and worship we hear the vital message that we are loved and valued. We are people of worth. And besides our own families, there is no better place to come to hear that.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey