

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 8/12/2024
Avoiding Stereotyping

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, August 13 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for teachers and school administrators as they prepare for the coming school year. Give them vision and strength to meet the challenges ahead and equip them to offer meaningful lessons to their students. Pray that they are blessed by their work and their encounters with the young people they teach.*

Dr. David W. Preus was the president (later named presiding bishop of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) from 1973 to 1987. Discussion during his time as the leader of the led to the merger of the ALC, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches forming the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988. On one occasion I heard Dr. Preus talk about the importance of avoiding stereotyping groups of people based on their nationality, culture, color, gender, age, or any of the other groupings we might place them in.

Dr. Preus told how much he enjoyed Norwegian jokes about the dumb things Ole and Sven would do or say. As a Norwegian himself, Dr. Preus said it might be okay for him to tell these ethnic jokes as he was telling them about himself. Dr. Preus, however, encouraged us to look to the Bible to help us with this practice of stereotyping and demeaning groups of people. He pointed out that if we really find the need to tell jokes about groups of people, we might instead use one of the nationalities in scripture that no longer exists. He named the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites as groups we might joke about without offending anyone today.

Throughout my life, I have challenged those who tell “dumb blonde” stories. In part, this was important to me because my late wife, Lori, and our three daughters, Terra, Rebekah, and Lydia are all blonde. All of them are very intelligent and have excelled in school and professionally. Yet all have experienced ridicule and condescension because of their hair color.

The “dumb blonde” typecast was first used in the United States in the 1920's. Ironically, the term was originally directed at men but now is almost exclusively about fair-haired women. The roots of the identification can be traced back to a blonde French courtesan named Rosalie Duthé. Duthé was satirized in a play for her habit of pausing a long time before speaking, seeming not only stupid but literally dumb in the sense of mute. Many blonde actresses have found their success by presenting themselves as naïve, foolish, and bumbling.

Grouping people and labeling people is contrary to what JESUS encouraged. JESUS always saw people as valuable individuals created and loved by GOD. And it's not just blonde women. We disappoint GOD whenever we name-call or demean others because they are not like us, or seek to make ourselves feel more important or powerful by belittling others. As followers of JESUS and looking to HIS example, we should be different. Our task should always be to find others as worthy and raise them up as part of GOD's good creation. We can do better.

By the way, Dr. Preus ended his talk by showing us what he meant about using long-gone groups from scripture for our joke-telling. “For example,” Dr. Preus said, “there were these two Hittites, Ole and Sven...”

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey