

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 9/2/2024
Love Overcomes Division

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, September 3 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for unity in the Christian church. Pray that the HOLY SPIRIT brings us together in mission to share the good news of JESUS CHRIST with our communities and world. Ask that we find common ground in our service and witness done in JESUS' name.*

Occasionally, I pause to ponder on the relationships within the disciples' group. We tend to think about them as a nice group of men who walked around a lot talking with and listening to JESUS. But we take it for granted that they always had food when they needed it or places to stay. And we generally feel that they got along pretty well. Sure, there were the occasional conflicts, like when James and John tried to get the best places in JESUS' Kingdom for themselves, and the others were irritated by their request. Still, we just accept that they had good relationships with one another, especially with JESUS around.

I did think that Judas Iscariot must have been the one least accepted. He was from the Kerioth, a city in southern Israel near the Dead Sea. All the other disciples were from the area around Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee to the north, so Judas was an outsider. I suspect the disciples may have made fun of him or even ridiculed him because he was from a different place. I've wondered if that made it easier for him to be tempted to betray JESUS.

Recently, though, in part because of the television series The Chosen, I've also been thinking about Matthew. There are ways that he was very much an outsider, too. As a tax collector, he supported the Romans as they occupied Palestine. That means that Matthew was unclean. He couldn't go to synagogue and worship GOD. He wouldn't have had many friends from among his neighbors, if any. He may have been rejected by his family. Further, his work supported the Romans with money taken from the people of his area. In doing so, he also, in a sense, rejected his own nation and culture. The disciples may not have liked Matthew very much either.

I wish the Bible went much deeper into the relationships of JESUS' followers. It would be good for us to be able to reflect on how this diverse group of people became the leaders of the early Christian church. But maybe we don't need to know more than what JESUS has given us. Very simply, HE tells us to love. Love GOD. Love yourself. Love your neighbors. Love your enemies. Certainly, they didn't always get along. But we don't either, do we? In church, our neighborhoods, and our families, we can rub each other the wrong way and have our differences. Yet, the love that JESUS calls us to show to all others can overcome any friction that arises. That which unites us is greater than that which divides us and our love of GOD and GOD's love for us can bring us back together, no matter what has come between us.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey