

## HEARTBEATS - Staying Connected 9/13/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

***ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, September 14 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who have lost loved ones, including yourself. Pray for those who have lost family or friends to violence, or disease, or tragedy. Ask God for the comfort that comes through the promise of God's love and the hope of the resurrection.***

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When we think about the disciples as a group traveling with Jesus, I suspect that most of us envision a friendly band of fellows who listened carefully to what Jesus said, pious men who sought to grow in their faith and commitment to God, and faithful believers who exemplified Jesus' call to love one another. Sure, they sometimes missed what Jesus was talking about until after the resurrection, but generally a congenial group that got along well with each other and wonderfully showed us what it means to follow Jesus. And I think, with the exception of Judas of course, they did finally get to a place like that.

Recently, though, as I thought about this group of rabbinic students (because that's really what they were when Jesus the rabbi, called them to follow Him), I began to wonder what things really might have been like among them. After all, we know that these were the ones who had been sent home from synagogue studies as children because they weren't able to memorize all the parts of what we today call the Old Testament. Those who were not the top students were sent home to learn the family trade or some other way of making a living. So, at least initially, their mind-sets were not on continuing their religious training that might lead to studies with a rabbi. No, they were laborer whom Jesus, for some reason, had chosen to come study with Him.

But thinking more about the pieces of information we know about the disciples, I wonder what their times together might have really been like. Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John had been partners in a fishing business. Philip was also a fisherman. These fishermen likely had a close relationship already that might have made it hard for others to join. All of them were from the area around Capernaum and Bethsaida near the Sea of Galilee in the northern part of Palestine, except for Judas who was from Kerioth in the south, east of the Dead Sea. They had a regional commonality that might have left Judas on the outside. Matthew was a tax collector or publican who worked with the Romans and taxed his fellow countrymen to support their Roman oppressors. Simon, on the other hand is described as a Zealot. The Zealots were a political group who aggressively opposed Roman occupation and detested those who supported or worked for peaceful relations with the Romans. I wonder what Simon's and Matthew's conversations might have been like. Jude, also called Thaddeus, is identified as a Zealot, too. Nathanael, also called Bartholomew, was cynical and initially didn't think very highly of Jesus: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Thomas, labeled doubter, was at the very least one who had to see things to believe them and seems to have been a pessimist.

This was quite the group that Jesus brought together to be His followers. I don't imagine that they got along all the time or in the ways we might tend to think. In fact, we know that they got into an argument about who was the greatest among them. There had to be other times of friction between them as well. Yet it was this diverse group of people whom Jesus chose to continue His ministry once His time on earth was over. It is this group who overcame their differences to share the gospel message throughout the world and down through the ages to us. And I think this serves as a good reminder to us, too, that though we may not all be the same, though we may have our own differences that might cause friction, though we don't always agree on everything, when it comes to the Kingdom of God, Jesus has also called us to be His followers, and committing ourselves to His teachings, we, also, can share the good news of God's love, not just in words, but also in our actions and interactions with each other.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey