

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/9/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

JESUS was a rabbi. He was not a carpenter, though HE may have helped HIS earthly father, Jospheh, until HE was about twelve. A couple of the Gospels identify HIM as “the carpenter’s son.” But, after completing HIS rabbinic studies at thirty, JESUS began to form HIS own rabbinic school where students would study to learn the scope of the rabbi’s teachings, called his yoke.

In Matthew 11:30, JESUS is recorded as saying, “For MY yoke is easy and MY burden is light.” Throughout the Gospels, JESUS explains what HIS yoke is. In John 13:34-35, HE says, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are MY disciples, if you love one another.” Many have taken this to mean that we are to love only other Christians, or just those in our denomination or in our church. But JESUS also expanded upon HIS yoke in Luke 6:32-36: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to sinners, expecting repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the MOST HIGH, because HE is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your FATHER is merciful.” JESUS’ yoke is simple: love all others. And while it may be easy to understand, as opposed to what the other rabbis taught, loving others can be a tremendous challenge, can’t it?

When rabbis chose students for their school, they commonly interviewed those students who had performed at the highest level in their synagogue studies to find out if which students could understand and learn the rabbi’s teachings. Those that the rabbi felt were capable of doing so were invited to “carry the rabbi’s yoke.” The rabbis would compete to get the best of the best students for themselves. When JESUS put together HIS school, HE chose people like fishermen, tax collectors, and so forth. These were just ordinary, common folks that JESUS invited. They weren’t scholarly people who were adept at religious studies. They were simple people, working in the jobs they had learned from their parents, or had fallen into for one reason or another. JESUS must have received ridicule from the other rabbinic schools for the shabby class HE had put together.

But that didn’t matter to JESUS. HE wanted common people to carry HIS yoke. He wanted average, everyday people to be the ones to share HIS message of love. They weren’t special. They were ordinary. They were people like...well...you and me. JESUS’ yoke is for everyone. JESUS calls all of us to carry HIS yoke. You don’t have to be a biblical scholar (though you can be). You don’t have to be a religious expert (though you can be that, too). All you have to do is understand HIS message of love for all people and then show it to everyone you meet. This is JESUS’ yoke. It isn’t hard to understand; it is easy and light. And all who have accepted HIS call to join HIS rabbinic school, to be HIS followers are called carry this yoke, to love all others in JESUS’ name.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey