

**The Northeastern Iowa Synod
Day of Renewal**

*The Readings for Maundy Thursday
John 13:1-17, 31b-35*

*Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ*

The May 2008 immigration raid in Postville revealed a great deal about what was going on in that meat packing plant. In addition to the fraudulent immigration papers, bogus vehicle registrations, and theft by under payment there was so much more. In the Application and Affidavit for Search Warrantⁱ a man identified as a Hasidic Jew duct-taped the eyes of an employee. The floor supervisor then took one of the meat hooks and hit the Guatemalan with it, apparently not causing serious injuries. How could this happen? I mean both morally, how can a person who lives by the Old Testament Law treat another human so badly. But also, as a bureaucrat I have to wonder “how did they do that?” I mean, logistically, how can so few Rabbis dominate so many Spanish speaking Latinos, specifically, who is this floor supervisor? An answer appears in an ICE Report where it says, two alleged supervisors at the Agriprocessors Inc. plant in Postville were arrested, Juan Carlos Guerrero-Espinoza, 35, and Martin De La Rosa-Loera, 43ⁱⁱ Doesn't this kind of remind you have Jewish collaborators in the ghettos and concentration camps during W.W.II? Jews who, for the price of little more than a slice of bread, would serve as the local police inside the Jewish Ghettos in Poland or as snitches in the concentration camps.

Taste for a moment how you feel about these Latinos or these Jews who betray their own countrymen for what is really only a handful of dollars.

In the time of Jesus, there were taxes. Especially there were tolls on the road so that those people transporting property could be taxed for using the road system. However, there were certainly not nearly enough Roman soldiers, or Italian citizens for that matter, to stand guard at every toll both on the all those ancient super highways of the Roman Empire. No, the work of collecting these taxes was franchised to local contractors. So, to be clear, there were Jews who paid the Roman government an amount of money to have the right to collect on the toll roads.ⁱⁱⁱ These tax collectors then hired local thugs to enforce the taxes and even collected more than authorized to ensure a

meaningful profit. So, in terms of their nationality these Jews cooperated with, even profited from the enemies occupying Judea. Religiously, these Jews rejected the faith of their ancestors by coming into physical contact with the gentiles. Socially, these Jews turned on their own people for what was probably a lot of money. So it is no surprise when Jesus says something like “What right do you have to claim any credit, even Tax Collectors do as much?”^{iv} Or again, an accusation is made against Jesus he is a “drunkard and a friend of tax collectors” Or again when Scripture lumps together in the oft repeated phrase “sinners and tax collectors” as if they are the very opposite of the children of God.^{vi} Pause and savor for a moment how much the Jews in the time of Jesus most have hated these collaborators. But knowing Jesus as being of infinite grace and forgiveness it is not miracle that Jesus calls Matthew Levi, a tax collector to be one of the Apostles.^{vii}

In the time of Jesus there were taxes and where there are taxes there are those who don't like them. Not only did they not like the taxes they did not like anything about the occupation by the Romans of the Holy Land. In the time of Jesus these revolutionaries were called the “Zealots.” Freedom fighters if you were Jewish, terrorists if you were not. The title Zealot comes from the same root as Jealous. The IDB explains that the Zealots “gave themselves over to God to be an agent of God's righteous wrath and judgment against idolatry, apostasy and any transgression of the law which excited God's jealousy.”^{viii} The Zealots began as early as 6 BC with Judas the Galilean and ended with the suicide of the defenders of the fortress Masada in 74 A.D.^{ix} Zealots were not a political party as much as cells of activists each following a different radical religious leader. The Zealots were well know for both individual acts of assassination like knifing a Roman military office in the street and for ambushing Roman patrols on the highway. Yes, the Zealots were the first Middle Eastern terrorists. They did not use roadside bombs and suicide bombers only because explosives had not been invented in that part of the world yet. Pause now for a moment and feel just how much you hate and fear the Middle Eastern religious fanatical terrorists hiding out from the military out in the wilderness. But knowing Jesus as being of infinite grace and forgiveness it is no miracle that Jesus calls Simon, a Zealot, to be one of the Apostles.^x

No, if what you want is a miracle it is not that Matthew Levi the tax collector or that Simon the Zealot were chosen to be Apostles but that both Matthew and Simon were chosen. Since they were both followers of Jesus they had to travel together, eat together, rest together, and serve together, for three

years they had to spend almost every moment near each other. In fact, all of the Apostles are a mismatch. One was a revolutionary and one was a collaborator; at least one had been wealthy, others had not; some brought their brothers with them some did not; some left behind wives and children, and one was stealing from the offering plate. It is no wonder that the disciples quarreled. After the evil spirit was cast out of the boy the disciples argued over who was the greatest.^{xi} James and John sent their mother to go behind the backs of the other to ask to be given a special place in the kingdom superior than that given to the other.^{xii} Again, they sat around the table at the last supper with the wine still on their breath and the bread crumbs still in their beards and argued who among them was to be considered the greatest^{xiii}. Remember, the fight isn't over who is good or not it is about who is "greatest;" that is to say, who is better; more orthodox; more righteous; knows God's will better; has a great gift of the Holy Spirit that the others.

Even after the resurrection, Peter and Paul the two great leaders of the church could not agree. Remember what Paul wrote: When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong".^{xiv} Also, Paul and my own patron Saint, Barnabas, could not find agreement.^{xv}

The last meal Jesus eats with his Apostles, the last moments He has to teach them before the crucifixion, on the Thursday of the new mandates Jesus says "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."^{xvi} Shortly thereafter in his last prayer with the Apostles Jesus prays to the Father asking "May they all be one. Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. ^{xvii} Isn't it interesting that the one last command of Jesus isn't that the Apostles maintain good order, keep doctrinal purity, or keep the youth group from messing up the church kitchen? No, it is that for the sake of those who do not believe we work together as one, loving each other even up to and including giving our lives for each other. The collaborator and the jihadist, the orthodox Peter and the evangelical Paul, the Sons of Thunder and Mary wiping her Lord's feet with her hair. Each is commanded to love the others even as much as Christ loves us. So in our nation's political debates, in our denomination's sexuality debates, in our congregation's differences, in our homes, our marriages, with our children, we dare not let our differences rule over us where our Lord Jesus commanded unity and humility.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding

keep our hearts and minds on Jesus Christ our Lord

Soli Deo Gloria

March 11, 2010

Nazareth Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa

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ⁱ Application and Affidavit for Search Warrant of the United States District Court Northern district of Iowa Case Number 08-MJ-110, paragraph 52.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement July 3, 2008

<http://www.ice.gov/pi/nr/0807/080703cedarapids.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Bamberger, B.J. "Tax Collector" The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 4, Page 522.

^{iv} Matthew 5:26

Matthew 11:18

^v Luke 3:12, 15:1,

^{vi} Michel. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Volume VIII, page 103

^{vii} Mark 2:14-17

^{viii} Farmer, W.R. "Zealots" Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Volume IV, Page 936

^{ix} Merkel, H. "Zealots" Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Volume VV, Page 979

^x Mark 2:14-17

^{xi} Luke 9:46

^{xii} Matthew 20:20-23

^{xiii} Luke 22:24

^{xiv} Galatians 2:11

^{xv} Acts 15:39

^{xvi} Luke 15:12

^{xvii} John 17:21