

“Ye Are My Friends”

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Of the Seventy

“O Outou o A'u Uo”

Saunia e Elder David L. Buckner
O Le Fitugafulu

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The Savior's declaration “ye are my friends” is a clarion call to build higher and holier relationships among all of God's children.

In a world filled with contention and division, where civil discourse has been replaced with judgment and scorn, and friendships are defined by -isms and -ites, I have come to know that there is a clear, simple, and divine example we can look to for unity, love, and belonging. That example is Jesus Christ. I testify that He is the great unifier.

We Are His Friends

In December of 1832, as “appearances of troubles among the nations” were becoming “more visible” than at any time since the organization of the Church, Latter-day Saint leaders in Kirtland, Ohio, gathered for a conference. They prayed “separately and vocally to the Lord to reveal his will unto [them].” In acknowledgement of the prayers of these faithful members during times of intense trouble, the Lord comforted them, addressing the Saints three times with two powerful words: “my friends.”

Jesus Christ has long called His faithful followers His friends. Fourteen times in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Savior uses the term friend to define a sacred and cherished relationship. I am not talking about the word friends as the world defines it—subject to social media followers or “likes.” It cannot be captured in a hashtag or a number on Instagram or X.

O le tautinoga a le Faaola “o outou o a'u uo” o se valaau manino e fausia ni sootaga maualuluga atu ma sili atu ona paia i fanau uma a le Atua.

I se lalolagi ua tumu i finauga ma fevae-vaeiga, lea ua suitulaga ai faamasinoga ma le faa'amu'amu i le faiga o fuafuaga e lipoti ai mataupu mo atugaluga o tagata ia faaopoopo le malamalamaaga, ma o faigauo ua faamatalatala i ituaiga - le 'au pai ma le 'au lafai, ua ou iloa e i ai se faataitaiga manino, faigofie, ma faaleatua e mafai ona tatou vaavaai i ai mo le lotogatasi, alofa, ma le avea ma ni ò. O lena faataitaiga o Iesu Keriso. Ou te molimau atu o Ia o le tuufaatasia sili.

O i Tatou o Ana Uo

Ia Tesema o le 1832, a o “atili aligaliga” le “tulai mai o mala i atunuu” nai lo se isi lava taimi talu mai le faatulagaga o le Ekalesia, sa faapopototo ai e taitai o le Au Paia o Aso e Gata Ai i Katelani, Ohaio, mo se konafesi. Sa latou tatalo “taitoatasi ma faatasi i le Alii e faaali mai lona finagalo ia i [latou]” I le faailoa aloaia ai o tatalo a nei tagata faamaoni o le ekalesia i taimi o mala tetele, sa faamafanafanaina ai i latou e le Alii, ma faatolu ona faalani le Au Paia i ni upu mamana se lua: “a'u uo.”

Ua leva ona faaigoa e Iesu Keriso Ona soo faamaoni o Ana uo. E faasefulu ma le fa i le Mataupu Faavae ma Feagaiga, ona faaoga e le Faaola le faaupugauoe faamatalatala ai se sootaga paia ma le pele. Ou te le o talanoa atu e uiga i le upu uoe pei ona faamatalaina ai e le lalolagi—e faalagolago i e taumuilumi i fesootaiga faaneionapo po o “likes.” E le mafai ona suitulaga ai se hashtag [faapefa'i] po o se fuainumera i luga o le

Admittedly, as a teenager, I remember dreaded conversations when I heard those painful words “Hey, can we just be friends?” or “Let’s just stay in the friend zone.” Nowhere in holy writ do we hear Him say, “Ye are just my friends.” Rather, He taught that “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” And “ye are they whom my Father hath given me; ye are my friends.”

The sentiment is clear: the Savior numbers each of us and watches over us. This watchcare is not trivial or insignificant. Rather, it is exalting, elevating, and eternal. I see the Savior’s declaration “ye are my friends” as a clarion call to build higher and holier relationships among all of God’s children “that we may be one.” We do this as we come together seeking both opportunities to unite and a sense of belonging for all.

We Are One in Him

The Savior beautifully demonstrated this in His call to “come, follow me.” He drew upon the gifts and individual attributes of a diverse group of followers to call His Apostles. He called fishermen, zealots, brothers known for their thunderous personalities, and even a tax collector. Their belief in the Savior and desire to draw unto Him united them. They looked to Him, saw God through Him, and “straightway left their nets, and followed Him.”

I too have seen how building higher and holier relationships brings us together as one. My wife, Jennifer, and I were blessed to raise our five children in New York City. There in that busy metropolis, we formed precious and sacred relationships with neighbors, school friends, business associates, faith leaders, and fellow Saints.

In May of 2020, just as the world was grappling with the spread of a global pandemic, members of the New York City Commission of Religious Leaders met virtually in an abruptly called meeting. There was no agenda. No special guests. Just a request to come together and discuss the challenges we were all facing as faith leaders. The Centers for Disease Control had just reported that our city was the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

Instagram po o le Tweeter.

Ou te tautino atu, a o o’u talavou, ou te manatua lo’u le fiafia i talanoaga pe a ou faalogo i na upu e ese le tiga “Ei, e mafai ona tau lava ina ta uo?” po o le “Se tau lava ina tatou faauo.” E leai se vaipanoa i tusitusiga paia tatou te faalogo ai ia te Ia o faapea mai, “Ua na o outou lava o ni a’u uo.” Ae, na Ia aoao mai e faapea “e le sili lava le alofa o se tasi i lenei alofa, ia tuuina atu e se tasi lona ola e sui a’i ana uo.” Ma “o outou ia o i latou o e na tuu mai e lo’u Tamā ia te a’u; o outou o a’u uo.”

E manino lava le gualofa: e silafia lelei i tatou taitoatasi e le Faaola ma vaavaaia i tatou. O lea vaavaaiga tuuto e le o se mea itiiti pe faatauvaa. Ae, e faaeaina, e musuia, ma e faavavau. Ou te vaai i le tautinoga a le Faaola “o outou o a’u uo” o se valaau manino e fausia ni sootaga maua luga atu ma sili atu ona paiai fanau uma a le Atua “ina ia tasi i tatou.” Tatou te faia lenei mea pe a tatou o mai faatasi e saili avanoa e soofaatasi ai ma se lagona o ni ō mo i tatou uma.

Ua Tasi i Tatou ia te Ia

Na matagofie le faapupula mai e le Faaola o lenei mea i Lana valaau e “sau, mulimuli mai ia te au.” Sa Ia faaaogaina mea alofa ma uiga faaleatua taitasi a se vaega eseese o soo ina ia tofia ai Ana Aposetolo. Sa Ia tofia le au faifaiva, selote, o le au uso na lauiloa i o latou uiga faafaititili, e oo lava i se ao lafoga. O lo latou talitonuga i le Faaola ma le mananao e faalatalata atu ia te Ia na soofaatasia ai i latou. Sa latou vaavaai atu ia te Ia, ma vaaia le Atua e ala atu ia te Ia, ma “sa latou tuua ai loa o latou upega, ae mulimuli atu ia te Ia.”

Ua ou vaai foi i le ala e aumaia faatasi ai i tatou ia tasi pe a fauina ni sootaga ia maua luga ma paia atu. Sa faamanuiaina i ma’ua ma lo’u toalua o Jennifer, e tausi le ma fanau e toalima i le Aai o Niu Ioka. O iina i lenei aai, na matou fauina ai ni sootaga taua ma le paia ma o matou tuaoi, uo i le a’oga, paaga faipisinisi, taitai o lotu eseese, ma le Au Paia.

Ia Me o le 2020, ina ua faatoa amata ona tauivi le lalolagi ma le salalau o le faama’i oti i le lalolagi atoa, sa fono sui auai o le Komisi o Taitai Faalelotu o le Aai o Niu Ioka i ala faaeletonika i se fono na taloina faanatinati. Sa leai se lisi o ni mataupu talanoaina. Leai ni malo faapitoa. Sa na o se talosaga e o mai faatasi ma talanoaina luitau sa matou feagai o ni taitai lotu. Sa faatoa lipotia mai e le Ofisa Tutotonu mo le Faafefoefoaina o le Faama’i e faapea o lo matou aai o le totonugale-

This meant no more gathering. No more coming together.

For these religious leaders, removing the personal ministry, the congregational gathering, and the weekly worship was a devastating blow. Our small group—which included a cardinal, reverend, rabbi, imam, pastor, monsignor, and an elder—listened to, consoled, and supported one another. Instead of focusing on our differences, we saw what we had in common. We spoke of possibilities and then probabilities. We rallied and responded to questions about faith and the future. And then we prayed. Oh, how we prayed.

In a richly diverse city filled with complexity and colliding cultures, we saw our differences dissipate as we came together as friends with one voice, one purpose, and one prayer.

No longer were we looking across the table at each other but heavenward with each other. We left each subsequent meeting more united and ready to pick up our “shovels” and go to work. The collaboration that resulted and the service rendered to thousands of New Yorkers taught me that in a world calling for division, distance, and disengagement, there is always much more that unites us than divides us. The Savior pled, “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.”

Brothers and sisters, we must stop looking for reasons to divide and instead seek opportunities to “be one.” He has blessed us with unique gifts and attributes that invite learning from one another and personal growth. I often told my university students that if I do what you do and you do what I do, we don’t need each other. But because you don’t do what I do and I don’t do what you do, we do need each other. And that need brings us together. To divide and conquer is the adversary’s plan to destroy friendships, families, and faith. It is the Savior who unites.

We Belong to Him

One of the promised blessings of “becoming one” is a powerful sense of belonging. Elder

mu lea o le taulaiga o le faama’i oti o le KOVI-TI-19 i le lunaite Setete. O lona uiga e le toe i ai ni tauaofiaga. Le toe i ai se toe o mai faatasi.

Mo nei taitai faalelotu, o le aveesea o le galuega faafaifeau patino, le tauaofiaga faatasi, ma tapuaiga faalevaiaso o se matuai ta faatau-maoi. O si a matou vaega toaititi—lea na aofia ai se katinale, faafeagaiga, rapi, taitai mosalemi, faifeau, a’oa’o, ma se toeaina—sa faalogologo i ai, faa’ole’ole, ma lagolago le tasi ma le isi. Nai lo le taulai i o matou eseese, sa matou vaai i mea sa tutusa ai i matou. Sa matou talanoa i mea e mafai ona fai ona talanoa ai lea i avanoa. Sa matou tutufaatasi ma tali atu i fesili e uiga i le faatuatua ma le lumanai. Ona matou tatalo ai lea. Oka se faanaunautaiga na matou tatalo ai.

I se aai e maoae le eseese ma faatumulia i aganuu lavelave ma le vavamamao, sa matou vaaia le molo’aua o o matou eseese ina ua matou tutufaatasi o ni uo e tasi le leo, tasi le faamoemoe, ma tasi le tatalo.

Sa matou le toe vaai aga’i atu i le isi itu o le laulau i le tasi ma le isi, ae ua vaai i luga faatasi ma le tasi ma le isi. Sa matou tuua isi fonotaga na sosoo ai ua sili atu ona lotogatasi ma ua saunia e sii a matou “suo” ma o e galulue. O le faapaaga na tulai mai ma le auaunaga na tuuina atu i le fiaafe o tagata Niu Ioka na aoaoina ai a’u e faapea, i se lalolagi e tausisi ai tagata mo fevaeaiga, tūtūmamao, ma le lē fia auai, e i ai lava le tele na’ua o mea e soofaatasi ai i tatou nai lo le fevaeaia’i ai. Na aioi mai le Faaola, “Ia tasi outou; ma afai tou te lē tasi e lē a a’u outou.”

Uso e ma tuafafine, ua tataua ona tuu lo tatou autilotilo mo mafuaaga e fevaeaia’i ai ae saili avanoa ia “tasi ai.” Ua la faamanuiaina i tatou i ni meaalofo tulagaese ma uiga faaleatua e valaaulia ai le aoao mai le tasi ma le isi ma tuputupu a’e ai le tagata lava ia. E tele taimi ou te ta’u atu ai i a’u tamaiti aoga i le iunivesite e faapea, afai ou te faia le mea tou te fai ae outou faia le mea ou te fai, e le manaomia la e le tasi le isi. Ae ona tou te le faia le mea ou te fai ma ou te le faia foi le mea tou te fai, o lea e manaomia ai e le tasi le isi. Ma o lena manaoga e soofaatasia ai i tatou. Ina ia fevaeaia’i ma faatoilalo o le fuafuaga lea a le fili e faatama’ia ai faigauo, aiga, ma le faatuatua. O le Faaola o Ia lea e tuufaatasia.

O Ni Ō Tatou o Ia

O se tasi o faamanuiaga folafolaina o le “ia avea ma tasi” o se lagona mamana lea o le avea

Quentin L. Cook taught that “the essence of truly belonging is to be one with Christ.”

On a recent visit with my family to the West African country of Ghana, I was enamored with a local custom. Upon arriving at a church or home, we were greeted with the words “you are welcome.” When food was served, our host would announce, “You are invited.” These simple greetings were extended with purpose and intentionality. You are welcome. You are invited.

We place similar sacred declarations on our meetinghouse doors. But the sign Visitors Welcome is not enough. Do we warmly welcome all who come through the doors? Brothers and sisters, it is not enough to just sit in the pews. We must heed the Savior’s call to build higher and holier relationships with all of God’s children. We must live our faith! My father often reminded me that simply sitting in a pew on Sunday doesn’t make you a good Christian any more than sleeping in a garage makes you a car.

We must live our life so that the world does not see us but sees Him through us. This does not take place only on Sundays. It takes place at the grocery store, the gas pump, the school meeting, the neighborhood gathering—all places where baptized and unbaptized members of our family work and live.

I worship on Sunday as a reminder that we need each other and together we need Him. Our unique gifts and talents that differentiate us in a secular world unite us in a sacred space. The Savior has called upon us to help one another, lift one another, and edify each other. This is what He did when He healed the woman with an issue of blood, cleansed the leper who pled for His mercy, counseled the young prince who asked what more he could do, loved Nicodemus, who knew but faltered in his faith, and sat with the woman at the well, who did not fit the custom of the day but to whom He declared His messianic mission. This to me is church—a place of gathering and recovery, repair and refocus. As President Russell M. Nelson taught: “The gospel net is the largest net in the world. God has invited all to come unto Him. ... There is room for everyone.”

ma ni ō. Na aoao mai e Elder Quentin L. Cook e faapea “o le ute o le avefa moni ma ni ō o le tasi lea ma Keriso.”

I se asiasiga talu ai nei ma lo’u aiga i le atunuu o Kana, i Aferika Sisifo, sa ou maofa ai i se agaifanua a le atunuu. Pe a taunuu i se lotu po o se aiga, sa faafeiloaia i matou i upu “e talileleia outou.” Pe a laulau mai meaai, e faasilasila mai e lo matou talimalo, “Ua valaaulia outou.” O nei faafeiloai faigofie, sa tuuina mai ma le faamoemoe ma le lotu atoa. E talileleia outou. Ua valaaulia outou.

Tatou te tuuina ni tautinoga paia faapena i luga o faitotoa o o tatou maotatapia. Ae o le faailo “E Talia Tagata Asiasi Mai” e lē lava lena. Pe o tatou talileleia ea ma le agalelei i latou uma e ulu mai i faitotoa? Uso e ma tuafafine, e le taitai ona lava le na o le nofo i atunoufoa. E tatau ona tatou ua’i atu i le valaau a le Faaola e fau ni sootaga maua luga atu ma paia atu faatasi ma fanau uma a le Atua. E tatau ona faatino lo tatou faatuatua! E tele ina faamanatu mai e lo’u tama faapea o le na o le nofo ai i se atunoufoa i le Aso Sa, e le avefa ai oe o se Kerisiano lelei e sili atu, nai lo le moe i se faletaavale e avefa ai oe o se taavale.

E tatau ona tatou ola i o tatou olaga ina ia le vaai mai ai le lalolagi ia i tatou, ae iloa atu o Ia e ala ia i tatou. E le na o Aso Sa e tupu ai lena mea. E tupu i le faleoloa, i le pamu kesi, i le fonotaga a le aoga, i potopotoga a le pitonuu—o nofoaga uma e galulue ma nonofo ai tagata ua papatisoina ma i latou e le’i papatisoina o o tatou aiga.

Ou te tapuai i le Aso Sa o se faamanatu tatou te manaomia e le tasi le isi ma tatou manaomia faatasi ai o Ia. O a tatou meaalofo tulagaese e eseese ai i tatou i se lalolagi salemasau, e soofaatasia i tatou i se avanoa paia. Ua valaauina i tatou e le Alii e fesoasoani le tasi i le isi, si’i a’e e le tasi le isi, ma fefaamalamalama’i le tasi ma le isi. O le mea lea sa Ia faia ina ua Ia faamaloloina le fafine na maua i le punatoto, faamamā le lepela sa ole atu mo Lona alofamutimutivale, fautuaina le aloalii taulealea na fesili po o le a se isi mea e mafai ona ia faia, sa alofa ia Nikotemo o le na iloina ae na tautevateva i lona faatuatua, ma sa nonofo i lalo ma le fafine i le vaieli, o lē sa le fetau ma agaifanua o na ona po ae na ia tautino i ai Lana misiona faalemesia. O lena mea ia te a’u o le lotu—o se nofoaga o le faapotopotoina ma le toefaafaoisia, lipea ma toefotuai. E pei ona sa aoao mai Peresitene Russell M. Nelson: “O le upega o le talalelei o le upega aupito sili lea ona telē i le la-

Some may have had experiences that make you feel you do not belong. The Savior's message to you and me is the same: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The gospel of Jesus Christ is the perfect place for us. Coming to church offers the hope of better days, the promise that you are not alone, and a family who needs us as much as we need them. Elder D. Todd Christofferson affirms that "being one with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is without doubt the ultimate in belonging." To any who have stepped away and are seeking a chance to return, I offer an eternal truth and invitation: You belong. Come back. It is time.

In a contentious and divided world, I testify that the Savior Jesus Christ is the great unifier. May I invite each of us to be worthy of the Savior's invitation to "be one" and to boldly declare, as He did, "Ye are my friends." In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

lolagi. Ua valaaulia e le Atuatagata umae o mai ia te Ia. ... O loo i ai se avanoa mo tagata uma."

Atonu e i ai nisi ua i ai ni aafiaga e te lagona ai e le o oe o se tasi o i latou. O le savali a le Faaola mo oe ma a'u, e tutusa lava: "Ia outou o mai ia te au, o outou uma o e tigaina ma mafatia i avega, o a'u foi e malolo ai outou." O le talalelei a Iesu Keriso o le nofoaga atoatoa lea mo i tatou. O le o mai i le lotu e maua ai le faamoemoe o aso sili atu, o le folafolaga e le tuua lava na o oe, ma o se aiga e manaomia i tatou e faapei foi ona tatou moomia ai i latou. Ua faamautinoa mai e Elder D. Todd Christofferson e faapea "o le tasi ai ma le Tama, le Alo, ma le Agaga Paia o le aunoa lea o se masalosalo i le aveai ai ma ni o a'ia'i." I soo se tasi ua la'a ese ma o loo sailia se avanoa e toefoi mai ai, ou te ofoina atu se upumoni e faavavau ma se valaaulia: O oe o ni o. O Foi mai. O le taimi lenei.

I se lalolagi fefinauai ma le fevataua'i, ou te molimau atu o le Faaola o Iesu Keriso o le tuu-faatasia sili lea. Se'i ou valaaulia i tatou taitoatasi ina ia agavaa mo le valaaulia a le Faaola ina "ia tasi" ma ia toa e tautino atu e pei ona sa Ia faia, "O outou o a'u uo." I le suafa paia o Iesu Keriso, amene.