

THERE WERE 12 DISCIPLES: HE HAS CALLED US, TOO!

Sing, *There Were 12 Disciples*, to the tune of *Bringing in the Sheaves*.

There were Twelve Disciples Jesus called to help him:
Simon Peter, Andrew, James, his brother John,
Phillip, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus,
Thaddeus, Simon, Judas, and Bartholomew.

He has called us, too. He has called us, too.
We are his disciples. I am one and you.
He has called us, too. He has called us, too.
We are his disciples. We his work must do.

I learned that song in third-grade Sunday School. Deb also learned it at her church growing up. Her version went something like this:

There were Twelve Disciples Jesus called to help him:
Simon Peter, Andrew, James, his brother John,
Then there was another one, and there was another one,
La, la-la, la-la, la, and Bartholomew.

Deb didn't have a very good memory when she was younger, but, boy, did that change! As a sign language interpreter, she has an auditory memory that's astounding. Whatever you say to Deb, she has the ability to recall verbatim. It's a real gift... sometimes!

Deb before and Deb after. Different and better. Our lives before realizing the love of Jesus and our lives after realizing his love. Different and better. Judah before the Babylonian exile and Judah at the great heavenly banquet promised afterward in Isaiah. Different and better. And, of course, the Disciples' lives before Jesus' Ascension and their lives after that event. Different and better.

Another reason the Disciples are different is because they now have the honorific title, "Saint," affixed before their name. It's St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. Bartholomew. The only exception is Judas. He was no saint. Unlike the other eleven, no one ever names their son Judas. No one ever names their daughter, Jezebel, after the notorious Old Testament queen and wife of evil King Ahab.

We think of the Disciples as saints. The truth is they were far from saintly when Jesus encountered them, as well as for their three years together.

We know the flaws of Judas. Matthew was a corrupt, greedy tax bureaucrat. Philip, a glory-hog. Thomas possessed an all-too-human package of doubts. Nathaniel (also known as Bartholomew) was an elitist snob prejudiced against poor, uneducated people from the country bumpkin village of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown.

And Peter – Peter! -- was not only an impetuous pain in the neck, but a coward who denied his friendship with Jesus at a crucial time. He resorted to violence when he

cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the Jewish High Priest, who joined a cadre of soldiers arresting Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. No wonder Jesus once referred to Peter as Satan (Matthew 16:23). What a grand mess of a human being! It was this man Jesus called the "rock" upon which he would build his church & give the keys to heaven (Matt. 16: 18-19)! There's certainly hope for the rest of us – truly!

Many of the women in Jesus' life were little better. Mary Magdalene was no Mother Superior. Martha was more concerned about housekeeping than spending time with Jesus. Joanna didn't show sound judgment marrying Chuza, the steward and confidant of one of the infamous Herods.

We forget what deeply flawed characters these persons were. Sadly, it doesn't improve with future generations. The Apostle St. Paul had issues with women. Then again, so did John Wesley. So did the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Paul acted superior to women. Fr. John couldn't manage healthy relationships with women. And Brother Martin had illicit relationships with women.

We can focus on our spiritual ancestors' failings. Many people do. It's all the rage nowadays. Although critics of the faith abhor anyone judging them, when it comes to the failings of Christians & the church itself, they can catalog our sins like the most judgmental, hellfire-and-brimstone preacher. The preacher will condemn you to hell. The woke critic will cancel you out of existence. Neither sounds fun. The finger-wagging preacher and the wokester each lack grace. They allow the sins to outshine everything else. Jesus had that right, too: "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7).

We might be tempted to rid the world of these embarrassing historic persons, but think about it. What would the world be without Jesus' original disciples and the women who devotedly carried the faith to the four corners of the earth? What would the New Testament be without the Apostle Paul and his emphasis on grace? What would Christianity be without John Wesley? What would America be without Dr. King? We would all be something less without them.

Each of these blemished persons found something compelling about Jesus Christ, about his claim on their life, and his call upon their life. They responded. Each one embraced the mission of **making disciples (Mt. 28:19), the command to love God and others (Mk. 12:30-31), the vision of "peace on earth & goodwill to all (Lk. 2:14b)."**

The title, saint, commonly applied, connotes someone who is sinless or as close to sinless as one can be. The biblical use of the term "saint," however, means a sincere follower of Jesus, a disciple with a lower case "d," be that individual here in the church militant on earth or alive in the church triumphant in heaven. Both participate in God's eternal realm. There is no implication of anyone being sinless, although we earnestly strive to exemplify Christ's perfect love. In the biblical sense, all who earnestly believe are saints. I'm talking to saints this morning.

Just like the leaders of the faith I mentioned, we, too, are called by Jesus. We, like some, can focus on and continue our self-righteous denominational in-fighting or we can live the mission of "Making disciples for the transformation of the world." We, like some, can focus on our congregation being significantly smaller than we were a generation ago, or we can be "Living for Jesus and changing lives." We, like some, can focus on personal inabilities and fears that emotionally cripple us or we can embrace forgiveness and new life by living & loving like Jesus. We rely not on our own selves, our own power, our own goodness, but rely on the Holy Spirit to do a new thing in us and

among us. Now is our time to fashion a new vision for this old mission (called) Grove Church.

“God, may your preferred will break through, change history, usher in and accomplish through us your new hopes, dreams and possibilities – both in the life of our church and in our own lives. We surrender our wills for yours in order to fully follow you.”

Yes, there were 12 Disciples whom Jesus originally called, but he didn't stop with them. **He has called us, too.**

Prayer of Christian discipleship.

For more of what it means to be a disciple today and fashion a new vision for the post-pandemic era, be here for my next sermon.

In the Name....

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