

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus Christ

The Twelve

Matthew 10.1-4, Mark 3.13-19, Luke 6.12-16, Acts 1.13
2.3.19

Matthew 10.1-4 *Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. ² Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.*

Mark 3.13-19 *And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. ¹⁴ And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have authority to cast out the demons. ¹⁶ And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), ¹⁷ and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder "); ¹⁸ and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.*

Luke 6.12-16 *It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; ¹⁵ and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; ¹⁶ Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

Acts 1.13 *When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.*

We're looking at the Gospels as we normally do at this time of the year... moving toward Easter.

This year we're paying close attention to Jesus Christ's Training of the Twelve. Why did He employ this method? Why did He delegate His authority and IF that was to be His way then why did He choose this particular group? They DON'T seem to be the best choice and they definitely don't seem to be the best MIX of people... There are (as we'll see) there are seeds of discord in the mix and there are seeds of destruction (a traitor among them!) So WHY?

This is the title-sermon in the series...today is when we meet "The Twelve". So, what do we learn from the way their little group was comprised? What do we learn about Jesus Christ's

intentions for them and what does the “method to His madness” what does it tell us about Him, about the nature of His movement AND about YOUR PLACE in it?

As we continue to “come and see” what it means to be a disciple, what do we learn from the Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ –

- 1) Who were the Twelve Apostles?
- 2) Why did He choose THEM as Apostles?
- 3) What IS it to be a modern Apostolic Christian?

They are listed four times (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts) and each time there’s a little variety.

People went by a variety of names in that time/place and had nicknames and other identifiers (like jobs or parentage or place of origin). Matthew also goes by Levi... Simon goes by Peter...Nathanael is Bartholomew.

Two of the list, James and John, may have been first cousins of Jesus Christ... (sons of Zebedee who was married to Salome, sister of Mary, mother of Jesus).

All but one were from the Northern part of Israel and the region of Galilee... Judas is apparently NOT.

Their names appear to be arranged in three groups of four...the best-known four...then the middle-known and the least-known...including the notorious Judas who’s called “the traitor” or “the one who betrayed Him”.

Some of them were leaders... Peter, Andrew, James and John... Others are virtually unknown... but all their names are inscribed on the foundation stones of the City of God (Rev 21.14)... all but one... we assume.

There’s a lot of tradition...and even early writings about some of them...Thomas (“the twin” and “the doubter”) is thought to have carried the Gospel to India. All but Judas (who took his own life)... all are said to have been martyred... but John, who apparently died on a prison island (where he did make good use of his time!)

Second point: Why were they chosen? Well, let me think about that in terms of function, significance, qualifications and mystery.

Functionally, they would BE the plan... they would be given authority and the things they saw Jesus Christ DO – they would be given power to DO... to show by their own hands, their own actions, they would demonstrate what the Reign of God looks like: “This is what happens when God steps in to reclaim the fallen world – sicknesses are healed, evil spirits that torment/enslave

people and spoil the world ARE BANISHED!” And these apostles are given authority to do signs and wonders that SHOW GOD’S KINGDOM – His reign over a broken world.

If you read the whole section in Matthew CH 10, you’ll see that they’re to live and function in faith – they take NOTHING with them... but totally depend on God’s provision. Their very lives are testament to the Reign of God...

AND their ministry is decisive... in other words, when they go out into the villages and teach and announce the Kingdom of God...when people welcome and accept their NEWS.... that will determine that person’s spiritual welfare... To embrace the Apostles’ message is to embrace the One who sent them. Apostle means “one who is sent” – more than a messenger, he’s an ambassador who speaks for the King. To reject the ambassador is to reject the King.

Later, Jesus Christ will give them the “keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16.19) meaning that they will decide together what the message of the Kingdom really IS. They will be so filled and guided by the God’s Spirit that they define who is IN and who is OUT... They will make sense of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and present it to the world... That’s what we’re reading when we read the New Testament - it’s the authorized version; it’s the terms of the Great Treaty as presented by the Ambassadors!

And, symbolically these are the heads of the restored Israel. Later He says to them, “you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Mat 19.28) This is how God will fulfill Israel’s mission by USING these TWELVE APOSTLES to gather in all the people of God. Twelve – a significant number... they’ll be the heads of the restored Israel and everyone who believes their testimony is in!

It’s such an important number for God’s whole plan that when one of them died...(Acts 1) he had to be replaced – that number had to be TWELVE!

And they are...a company...a community... The way Jesus Christ constituted them is significant. He draws from ONE region of the world (Israel and Galilee) but He makes them a strikingly diverse group.

On His team...Jesus Christ puts a Right-Wing EXTREMIST and a Left-Wing FANATIC! Simon the Zealot was a member of a violent Pro-Jewish terrorist network devoted to getting rid of the Romans and Matthew WORKED for the Romans!

And this is significant in that when I come into the Church I will find myself sitting next to people who MAY BE VERY DIFFERENT FROM ME... people who might be my natural enemies... and Jesus Christ weaves that into the fabric of His movement.

It's there from the start... people who come into this apostolic church can only BE HERE IF THEY COME TO KNOW A BASIS FOR UNITY that transcends the most deeply rooted differences and disparities.

No wonder the first Apostle, Simon Peter would later write to church members, some from Jewish backgrounds and others who were Gentiles, "for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY." (1Peter 2.10)

Peter and the others would see... "Jesus Christ, has lived the obedient and morally beautiful life of perfect love...and did that for people who just never get it right...never finish the 'to-do list'. He DID what we fail to DO! He finished our list: 'It is finished!'"

He died for the sins of guilty people...and WE ARE ALL GUILTY...Jews and Gentiles... rich and poor... educated and ignorant...right-wingers, left-wingers, moderates...radicals...all are IN THE SAME CATEGORY – the guilty. And Jesus Christ came into the world to carry the guilt of His people... NO ONE CAN GET RID OF HIS OR HER GUILT – we're all in the same boat!

That's why He put on His original team – people who could NO WAY get along... they had to see from the start that we are, EVERY ONE OF US – totally disqualified...and in need of grace!

And when these Apostles...with all their extremes and their hang ups...when they saw Him rise from the dead... they would be the eyewitnesses to the world...to say, "We saw Him...spoke with Him...heard and touched Him...HE IS ALIVE AND ATONEMENT is made...believe it...receive it...come alive!"

And in some wonderful and awful mystery... even as He was calling these unqualified bumbler and "slow to believe" often arrogant and often clueless young men (and some say that they may have been in their teens and twenties!) – in the mix, Jesus Christ calls one... whom He alone knows to be a traitor.

In the calling of the Twelve...one will be welcomed as a friend who would TURN ON HIM...and send Him to the Cross...and that horrible betrayal, that Cross... would be the salvation of everyone who believes.

A.B. Bruce said that the Twelve was the Church in miniature. Jesus is reconstituting Israel, the Apostolic Church with a bunch of rough-cut, raw people who were astounded by this Person...the God-Man who controlled the winds and the waves and made blind men see...and who opened their eyes to see...a group of young men (maybe, as I said, maybe very young!) who could NO WAY get along unless they saw how really messed up they ALL were – so messed up that God had to become a Man and die for them...

The Apostolic Church...is a Church built on the teaching and testimony of these eyewitnesses... but it's also a church that's "apostello", i.e. a SENT Church.

We too are SENT into the world...as witnesses...and one thing that makes US qualified...is that we see how really DISQUALIFIED we all are!

And like them, the original Twelve...we are WILLING...because, as they will later say, "Where else can we go? YOU ALONE have the words of eternal life!" (John 6.68) We're willing because we're desperate...and because we believe that Jesus Christ can help us...ONLY HE can help us.

He spent the entire night in prayer to His Father...then He appointed the Twelve. Leadership is important... In some sense, He entrusted the fate of the world to THEM, these teen-agers, these unstable, half-baked yahoos... BUT...He also committed to THEM...committed HIMSELF to THEM.

He trained them...He showed them...lived with them ... lived FOR them...died for them...rose again from the dead FOR THEM...and then poured out His Spirit on them. No wonder their critics later said, "These men have turned the world upside down!" (Acts 17.6)

That's what it means to be in the Apostolic Church – people made willing because we're desperate... and we're clinging to the One we heard about from them, the Apostles' witness... the One who brings weird people together...people who learn to boast ONLY in Him and ONLY in God's grace...people who are being renovated and changed and made useful... people "apostello", SENT into the world...with His message and in His authority... confident in Him!

If you haven't joined us...why not? You think you're not good enough? Neither are WE! Neither were THEY! But He will take you on...He commits everything to those who see their faults and cling to Him.

He will commit to shape and develop and make you all you were meant to be... He will send you (along with these other ragamuffins) SENT into the world to serve...to testify... But FIRST you have to despair of saving and ruling yourself...and you have to make your boast in Him alone.

The Communion

2.3.19

There's a warning against taking the Lord's Supper in the wrong way – (see the end of 1st Corinthians CH 11) – St Paul said if a person does not judge the body rightly....” We, interpret that to mean, “If a person doesn't understand what the Church is, the Body of Christ...” So, if you're not a member of a church (keeping aloof) if you're not connected to a group of people...a local church, you're not judging the significance and importance of the church...and we're passing on the warning to you...

In that same passage...St Paul pointed to what we've talked about today...that the Church is built on the transmission of truth...the witness of the Apostles that's handed down as a treasure from one generation of Christians to the next. Listen: “For I received from the Lord that which I also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (23-24)

See? The apostolic church is given this treasure...the apostles received it and pass it on: “For I received from the Lord that which I also PASSED ON to you.”

Here, we participate in this treasure...it's this simple meal where we join with Jesus Christ and His Apostles in that upper room...and WE, together with THEM, eat grace...we take Jesus Christ as He's offered...our faith digests grace as our mouths eat the bread and drink the wine.

He is the Host and He IS THE MEAL...He gives Himself to US and we are just desperate enough to eat...

WE NOW INTERNALIZE Jesus Christ ...as they did and as they passed on to us...to continue in this tradition until Jesus Christ returns and when the whole Apostolic Church is all gathered in for a feast that will never end.

As we've been taught...in the faith once passed on to all the saints (Jude 1.3)...as the Apostles passed on to the Church LET US EAT...and receive sustaining grace.