

Sermon – 20/02/2011 pm

Choosing the Twelve

Study Text: Luke 6:12-16

In the youth club we are studying the life of Jesus. His ministry in Galilee, which centred on the town of Capernaum, is called the year of popularity. We have seen how popular Jesus was becoming with crowds coming to hear him preach the kingdom of God and see him heal lots of sick people. In our reading today we are told that a great multitude gathered. They came from over 150km to the south and 100km to the north (6:17). It was becoming difficult for Jesus to minister to so many people.

We have also seen that opposition towards Jesus was on the increase. The Pharisees were watching him and criticizing him for eating with tax collectors and sinners. They became furious when he paid no regard to their Sabbath rules. This group began planning how they might get rid of Jesus.

1. Pray

With great crowds to deal with as well as increasing opposition Jesus went to his Father in prayer. He prayed all night. Did he ask his Father to give him men to help him? We are not told the content of his prayer but when it was day he called his disciples together and chose twelve men to be with him. He wanted these men to be with him that they might share in the ministry. He wanted them to learn from him that he might send them out as his ambassadors.

Jesus himself was sent into this world by the Father. He is the only begotten Son of the Father doing the will of his Father (John 5:19). There was no other divine son to assist him. 'How could poor perishable creatures like us bring anything to such a work' said Calvin. 'The very angels in paradise would not have sufficed' he said. None of these men was worthy to be an apostle of God. None came with flash Curriculum Vitae. Jesus would later remind them *you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit* (John 15:16).

Jesus had only men; sinful human beings like us to call upon to assist him in doing the Father's will on earth. What sort of men did he want? What sort of men did he call? Was it rich and famous leaders of men? Was it educated and learned men? Were there any such people among the twelve?

Jesus needed men who would learn from him and be faithful to him. He needed men who would carry on the work when he was taken away. Already Jesus had spoken of being taken away (5:35). Finding faithful men would be a challenge. Jesus needed to pray.

Jesus went up on the mountain to be alone with God. He must have been exhausted but he spent the night in prayer. He cried out to his Father in heaven. He was seeking the will of God in this particular matter. So much of the ministry would depend upon the men that he chose. Indeed these men would become the foundation of the church. This was a very important decision.

The choosing of men to lead the church is still a very important decision. It must be done with much prayer. The Lord wants men who will learn from him and who are faithful to him, men to preach the gospel and build up his church in all the world.

He does not want men who can find nothing better to do than be a preacher. He does not want men who come with their own agenda for the church. He does not want celebrities or high achievers. He

wants men who will learn from the master and serve the Father with all faithfulness and fidelity. We must pray as Jesus did before appointing men to preach and teach the kingdom of God.

2. Appointed

Jesus named the twelve ‘apostles’ (6:13). The word ‘apostle’ simply means ‘sent one’. Although he named them apostles they are often referred to in the New Testament as ‘the twelve’. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate an ongoing apostleship.

The word ‘apostle’ can be used with the simple meaning of ‘a person sent out’, but only the twelve mentioned in the Bible were appointed by Jesus. They were ordinary men, fallen human beings, but they were unique in being appointed by Jesus. Jesus appointed the twelve and gave them authority to heal the sick and cast out demons (Mark 3:15). This authority was not given to be passed onto a line of priests, to the pope in Rome or to humanly appointed apostles today.

Who did Jesus choose as his apostles? What sort of men did he choose? Why did he choose only males? What did he choose them to do? Why did he choose twelve? Why did he choose a man he knew would betray him? These are questions that arise from this passage and we will try to answer them as we look at this passage.

After spending the night in prayer Jesus called the disciples to himself. ‘Disciple’ means ‘follower’. Many people were following Jesus at this time both men and women. Some were more committed than others (John 6:66). Among his first disciples were Peter and his brother Andrew who were fishermen. John and James, the sons of Zebedee are also mentioned by Luke and other gospel writers as fishermen who left their nets to follow Jesus at the beginning (5:10).

We know more about these fishermen than any of the others – with the possible exception of Judas Iscariot. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. He told his brother Peter ‘we have found the Messiah’. Peter himself was moved to confess his sin before Jesus (5:8).

Peter is named first in all the accounts of the apostles (Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts). He is the only one whose name was changed by Jesus – from ‘Simon’ to ‘Peter’ (Greek) or ‘Cephas’ (Hebrew). His new name means ‘piece of rock’. At the beginning he was anything but a rock. He was impetuous and often spoke without thinking of what he was saying. But outset Peter took on the role of spokesman for the group.

James and John were fiery young men. Jesus actually gave them the name ‘Sons of Thunder’ (Mark 3:17). They wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven on a village of Samaritans who did not welcome them.

In the second group of four come Phillip and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas. When looking at the four accounts or listings of ‘the twelve’, commentators speak of three groups of four. In all accounts the names in each of these three groups are the same. Matthew, otherwise called Levi, was a tax collector. He was called by Jesus to follow him (5:27). We do not know the profession, or anything else really, of the others in this group – Thomas doubted that Jesus was risen but later confessed Jesus as ‘my Lord and my God’. In south India there is a strong tradition that Thomas established the church there.

In the third group of four are James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot (6:15 – Simon the Canaanite in Mark). This is not James the Lord’s brother or the James who wrote the Bible book of that name. He is probably the James whose mother Mary went to the tomb of Jesus (24:10). Among the twelve was a second James, a second Simon and also a second Judas. The last two

named in this list are Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot. The first Judas is called Thaddeus by Mark. He is the Judas who wanted Jesus to show himself to the world (John 14:22).

Thomas was very different to Peter. One was a pessimist and other an optimist. We might wonder how the tax collector who worked with the Romans got along with the zealot who was violently opposed to the Romans. The twelve were by no means a homogenous group. Some had little in common apart for their love for Jesus. Is this not a picture of the church?

3. Judas Iscariot

Last on the list is *Judas Iscariot who became a traitor* (6:16) or betrayed him (Mark 3:19). Iscariot is understood to be the name of a place in Judea. This means Judas was the only one not from Galilee. Judas was not a nice fellow. He complained about Mary pouring expensive perfume on Jesus feet.

Judas became the treasurer of the group and often helped himself to the funds (John 12:6). Maybe this was why he stayed when he could easily have left. Jesus did not compel anyone to stay (John 6:67). Judas stayed with the twelve even as his heart was hardened by sin. He allowed Satan to enter his heart, leading him to the despicable and deadly act of betraying his master.

Why did Jesus choose a man who would betray him? From the outset Jesus of course knew that Judas would betray him. After a night of prayer he chose these men, including Judas Iscariot. These were the men, all twelve, the Father gave him (John 17:11). They were men given to him out of the world. The world is full of sinners, some predestined to glory and some to damnation. The twelve were men out of the world. Many a time they failed Jesus – Peter denied him and Thomas doubted – but all were redeemed, apart from Judas.

Jesus did not tell Judas to leave but sat down at the table with him. Judas rejected the grace of Jesus. He chose to deny rather than believe in Jesus. The ‘son of perdition’ was fully responsible for his action and the consequences of that action.

Why did Jesus choose Judas? *That Scripture might be fulfilled* said Jesus referring to Psalm 41:9 (John 13:18, 17:12). Scripture must be fulfilled. It was revealed in the will of God that Jesus be betrayed by one close to him. ‘The shocking tragedy of Judas’ life is proof not of Jesus’ impotence, but of the traitors impenitence! Woe to that man!

We passed over the question of why twelve? We are not told directly but there is probably a link with the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve apostles will become the pillars of the new Israel of God. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on the twelve foundations of the holy city coming down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21).

Jesus chose twelve that they might be with him. Day and night they would be learning from the master. Jesus sent them out to preach and to heal as he was doing (9:1). They continued this ministry after his resurrection and ascension, preaching not only to the Jews but to all the world. Elders later joined the apostles as leaders of the church. Some of the twelve later wrote much the New Testament.

The apostles are no longer in this world, but the church they established is. The church continues to be led by men who are called by God, men from all sorts of backgrounds, men who are weak and foolish in the eyes of the world (I Corinthians 1:27). We pray that these will be men whose focus is upon the master and doing his work with all faithfulness and fidelity.

The church today will have its traitors. If Jesus chose a traitor for an apostle why should we think the church will be without such men? The world will smear the whole church because of them but the church of God will go on – it will prevail. We look to Jesus, the head of the church, to send out faithful labourers into the harvest field, men who *walk worthy of the calling with which you were called* (Ephesians 4:1).

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