

July 14th 2013 "Jesus As The World Sees Him" #5 'The Friends He Chose'
Mark 3:13-19

One of the things I was often told as a young person growing up was that you could always tell a lot about a person by the company they kept. So if you hung around with people who got drunk, lived loosely, and were lazy no-hopers, then there was a good chance that you too would share their reputation, even if you didn't deserve it. You would be degraded by association.

Such a view was obviously held by most of the Jewish religious leaders at the time of Jesus, because they surveyed the company Jesus kept and they were alarmed, disgusted, and suspicious. For when the world then looked at Jesus they saw three surprising groups of people that He as a religious figure associated with as His friends—His motley band of 12 Apostles—A group of women—And a collective bunch that they labeled as 'sinners'.

The upright and 'churchy type' folk of Jerusalem would have written Him off as having nothing good to say or teach, simply because of the vast number of these unsuitable friends that gathered around Him.

Well this morning we are going to look at the first of those three groups. The 12 disciples. They are listed in three of the four Gospels and also in the first chapter of Acts so there can be no doubt about their existence or their importance. Mark's list is probably the most casual of all as it mentions the nicknames Jesus gave to Simon—Jesus named him Peter which means rock. John and James who Jesus called the sons of thunder....we can only wonder about their personalities.

And then there is Thaddaeus which is an obvious nickname for a man who is known as Judas son of James in Luke's list, for Thaddaeus means "of the breast" which was used as a term of derision for someone who was a mummy's boy. Now Peter gave Mark the information about the disciples and we can only imagine what he thought at times about Thaddaeus!!

Then there was Simon the Zealot, who most take to be from an anti-Roman group known as the Zealots. Members of this group would carry a small dagger concealed in their robes, so if they happened on a lone Roman soldier they had their weapon of death ready to use. As a Zealot Simon would have especially hated Jews who collaborated with the Romans by collecting taxes for them. As Roman sympathizers or collaborators many

Jews saw them as the scum of the earth but the Zealots despised them as the enemy in their midst. That is why it is so surprising that amongst the 12 there is Matthew, who in his list of disciples describes himself as a tax collector. That would have made for some interesting discussions.

Then finally there is Judas Iscariot who was the only disciple who was not from Galilee. He is always mentioned last in the listings of the disciples and he is always referred to as the one who betrayed Jesus.

Now as far as the Jewish leaders of that day were concerned, the real issue was not who was on the list of the twelve disciples but who wasn't. Not one of the men that Jesus chose to be His inner group of disciples came out of the religious world. Not one was a rabbi. Not one was a scribe. Not one was a theologian. Not one was an academic, a priest, a Pharisee, a Sadducee. To miss quote a famous church statesman of our age—Not one of them was an A grader.

Someone wrote this about them. ***"Ordinary in every way they were laymen, they were laborers, they worked with their hands. They were prone to all the sins, all the errors in judgment, all the bad attitudes, all the lapses of faith and all the failures. As ordinary as they were Jesus chose them."***

The reason this would have been a real issue for the Jewish leaders was on account of the fact that Jesus chose 12, and that number was full of meaning for them. The history of God's people as a Nation included a man called Jacob who was given the name Israel by God. He had twelve sons from which came the twelve tribes that made up the Nation of Israel. God appointed leaders over those twelve tribes.

By the time of Christ the chief priests and the Sanhedrin had taken that mantle of leadership upon themselves. Suddenly Jesus arrives on the scene and He is proclaimed by John the Baptist as the coming Messiah who brings into being the Kingdom of God. And Jesus institutes a new spiritual leadership of 12 men for that Kingdom. And that very obvious selection of 12 ordinary men sent an unmistakable message to that current Jewish leadership about their position before God.

They had been rejected and replaced by ordinary guys who the Pharisees accused of knowing so little that they didn't even wash their hands in the

ceremonially approved fashion. Yet to those 12 ordinary men Jesus said in Matthew 19:28

"Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Concerning these twelve men someone else wrote:- ***The twelve disciples were men of ordinary means, working as a fisherman, a tax collector and a revolutionary among other occupations and they experienced much hardship, failings and doubts during their following of Jesus; however, these men played an important part in spreading the word of Jesus Christ and Christianity.***

The notes today are a brief overview of what these disciples went on to do.

But before they went on to do those great things for God, these ordinary men were chosen by Jesus to belong to Him in the same way we belong to Him today. Mark 3:13 tells us

¹³ Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.

Luke tells us that Jesus had in fact spent the whole night in prayer on that mountainside before He called the 12 to Him. Their choice was no random schoolyard pick. He communicated at length with His Father before He chose each one and when He called them it was because He wanted them.

In similar manner when you felt the call of God on your heart and life—however you felt it, and however long ago you did—it was because He wanted you in His kingdom. He saw within you all the precious things that others do not see and He loved you as you. He put out His hand and said come, and you did, and however ordinary you may think you are, you responded to Jesus and therefore are special in your Saviour's sight.

Mark then goes on to say in v14

He appointed twelve that they might be with him

In His physical state Jesus at that time was limited to the 12 and He appointed them to be with Him. With all their inexperience, their roughness,

their weaknesses and stubbornness, He appointed them to be by His side and to learn from Him.

And surely that is what our Lord now does for all that He calls to follow Him. For in His glorified state He is able to invite us all to walk alongside Him and to be constantly close to Him. That is what He wants from us.

Are you aware of that appointment this morning. That Jesus wants you to spend your time with Him. Whatever you may be doing, whoever you may be with, wherever you happen to be? He wants you to live, act, talk, and care in the knowledge that you are with Jesus and He is right there with you.

And Jesus won't send you away if you are prone to making mistakes and putting your foot in it every time you speak. Simon Peter was like that and He put up with Him.

He won't reject you if at times you let Him down and desert Him. All the disciples forsook Him and fled at the cross but He appeared to all of them after His resurrection.

Jesus wants you with Him so that He can gradually make you like Himself, because He knows that is the best He can do for you now, and because He loves and values you.

Then finally Mark tells us in v14 and 15

and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

Jesus has a Grand purpose in mind for all those who come to Him and receive Him as Saviour and Lord, and that is the building up of His Kingdom. This includes the numerical increase as other souls are saved by His Spirit, and the influential increase as His people live lives in this world that glorify their Saviour.

The task is enormous and there are a multitude of ways that the Lord desires to achieve it through His servants. That is why He has different purposes for each one of His followers.

For these twelve men He gifted them to preach, and the Greek word here is to proclaim, the Good News, and He also wanted them to have authority over demons.

For the Apostle Paul who came on the scene some time later and who was from a strong religious background, the task was quite different. But the end goal was still the same.

God has a place for everyone whatever their natural abilities, standing in life, background, or previous history. He has His place and purpose for you and you can trust Him to send you out to do just what He wants you to do, and to be just what He wants you to be.

In your own eyes you may not feel very special or gifted. Perhaps you too, like those disciples, can look back on glaring mistakes you made or attempts to be someone for Christ that never quite came off. You may be struggling desperately to find what Jesus wants you to do so that you can set out and do it, or perhaps you've given up trying and have started feeling that as a Christian you are close to useless.

Jesus' calling of the 12 proves that He is in control. He chose you and He knows exactly why. He set you in place somewhere to be part of His commission. Simply allow Him to show you His purpose. Be patient and trusting, and be ready always to respond instantly to His gentle nudges, and to the opportunities you have daily to shine for Him. For He has called you to be with Him daily, not because He had to but because He wanted to.