**Jesus Calls the Twelve Apostles**

February 3, 2013

Mark 3:13-35

Key verse 3:14 “He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”

Today’s passage is very significant in Mark’s gospel: the calling of the twelve apostles. As we have seen thus far, Jesus’ ministry to the crowds had broad appeal. People from all over Israel experienced the kingdom of God through Jesus. But there was one problem. There were so many people and only one shepherd, Jesus. So Jesus lamented, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” In this passage, Jesus called the twelve disciples in the hope of raising them as shepherds like himself who could serve their suffering people. We are also called to be disciples of Jesus and disciple-makers among college students. Let us learn from Jesus what it means to be disciples and disciple-makers, and how we too can grow as successful disciple-makers.

**First**, Jesus appoints the twelve apostles (13-19). In verses 7-12, we see that many came from Jerusalem, Judea, Idumea, and Tyre and Sidon (8-9). They wanted Jesus’ hand of healing. They were crowds of people who were sick and demon-possessed (10-11). They frantically tried to get near him and touch him. Jesus was almost pushed into the lake. This scene describes the situation of people without a shepherd. What did Jesus do when he saw the hopeless situation of the times? Jesus went up into the hills to pray (13; Lk 6:12). After spending the whole night in prayer, Jesus appointed twelve disciples. Jesus did not despair because of the dark world situation. Rather Jesus prayed how to fulfill God’s will for world salvation. Then God gave him wisdom to raise disciples for the future work of God. So many people followed Jesus, but Jesus called to him those he wanted. He chose and hand-picked twelve, and gave them privilege to be with him and learn from him. John 15:16a says, “you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit; fruit that will last.” Universities review high school grades (in the US, SAT scores) before giving admission to the students. But Jesus did not choose them because they were qualified. He chose them by his grace and they responded to his calling. Who were those who received such privileges?

Look at verses 16-19. “These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.” Simon was ambitious and talkative; James and John were explosive--one time they asked Jesus to bring down fire on a Samaritan village because they did not welcome them. That is why Jesus gave them the name “Sons of Thunder.” Philip was a smart business guy. He was able to estimate how much they need to feed 5,000; Bartholomew did not seem to make any difference. But he was always at dinnertime; Matthew messed up his life as a tax collector; Thomas is known as doubting Thomas; James and Thaddaeus must have been quiet; Simon was a nationalistic zealot; Judas the betrayer. Jesus appointed diverse group of people as his disciples. They were not perfect. Each one had his own share of problems and weaknesses. But Jesus had a vision that they would grow as future spiritual leaders and shepherds and Bible teachers.

Simon means sand. He was shaky and impulsive. He had a big mouth. He boasted that he would die for Jesus, but he denied Jesus three times. But Jesus gave him the nickname Peter. That means rock. Jesus had a vision that Simon would grow as rock-solid servant of God. Jesus saw a potential in each of them to grow as a shepherd in the future. When we look at sheep with Jesus’ eyes, everyone can become a shepherd. One thing striking in his selection of disciples is that there are no religious leaders. They were old wineskins, too rigid and stubborn to learn. Jesus seemed to choose those who had learning minds. No matter how weak or unqualified they might be, Jesus believed that they could grow as shepherds and spiritual leaders in his ministry. Sometimes when we see sheep with many problems, we feel burdened and wish to have clean-cut and smart young men as disciples who have no problem at all. But there is no such sheep. As long as sheep have learning minds, Jesus has a vision for them to grow as his disciples.

Then what was Jesus’ method of raising disciples? Look at verse 14a. “They might be with him.” What a privilege they enjoyed being disciples of Jesus! They could watch and learn from Jesus closely--how he taught, listened to people and ministered to them. They could ask him and get answer from him. Jesus could know each of them personally and taught them according to their needs. Jesus could also train them practically. One time Jesus took some of them to a high mountain and showed them his glorious image of the kingdom of God. Another time, Jesus took some of them to Gethsamane and they watched Jesus praying in agony. By living together, they witnessed the practical life of Jesus and learned of Jesus personally. Those who were outside knew about Jesus superficially. But these disciples witnessed Jesus with their own eyes and learned of Jesus, and experienced the power of God and grace of Jesus deeply. Many people were amazed at the transformation in the lives of twelve ordinary men. Acts 4:13 says, “When people saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” We become a lot like the people we spend most of our time and mental energies on.

Here we learn that discipleship is not a skill which we learn at school. Today there is tendency to specialize everything. Secretaries are called, “office system specialists.” They say, “I specialize in this, and you specialize in that.” Some people make an excuse not to teach the Bible, saying, “Some people specialize in teaching the Bible, and I am not.” Many churches adopted this idea and they raise up professional Bible teachers, and lay people are not properly trained to be Bible teachers. Many say that the 21 century will be a century of professionals. Everybody has to be a professional in one thing. It may be true. However, it is not true with discipleship, because discipleship is not a skill or having knowledge of the Bible. Discipleship is having Jesus’ character such as humbleness and gentleness. We are called to be Jesus’ ambassadors on earth.

Can we be with Jesus today? Yes! Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus dwells in those who obey his words (Jn 14:23). Jesus remains in those who remain in his words (Jn 15:4). Jesus promises that where two or three gather in his name, Jesus is there with them (Mt 18:20). It is most important for Jesus’ disciples to be with Jesus. We can be with Jesus through Bible study, Christian fellowship, and prayer. Note that when Jesus called the twelve, he called them as a group, “…that they might be with him.” In North America we have a strong idea about individualism and privacy. Many try to follow Jesus by themselves, without anyone’s help. Many feel free to break their relationship with a Christian community in an instant if they are challenged. However, in many cases, when they leave church, they leave God. Then as they listen to seductive music and use Facebook, they think they are free. Yet, they are not free. When they are not with Jesus, they are under the rule of Satan. So they never grow spiritually. How can we become apostles of Jesus? We must be with Jesus and with Jesus’ people all the time. We must be with Jesus and Jesus’ people even when we don’t feel like it, especially when we don’t feel like it. We should invite Jesus into all of our relationships. We must be with Jesus in our homes and in our apartments. In those settings, we reveal our sins and see others’ sins, and we learn to bear with others, forgive others, and pray for others. Gradually we will be sanctified (1Jn 1:7). Let’s remember that the secret to growing as apostles is to be with Jesus and his people all the time. Actually when we look at the life of disciples in the gospel, we can find them struggling with each other, instead of coworking. They were competitive, jealous, ambitious, and selfish. But through this struggle, they learned to accept one another, develop kinship and learn to cowork together. Later Peter and John became loving coworkers. I thank God for our small group meetings, where our young leaders can have fellowship, share their struggles and pray for each other.

Then what was the purpose of Jesus’ discipleship ministry? Look at verses 14-15. “He appointed twelve--designating them Apostles--that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” What is the difference between disciples and apostles? Disciples are students. The word ‘disciple’ came from the word ‘discipline’, or training. Disciples are those who receive training. An apostle means ‘one who was sent.’ Jesus had a vision to teach and train these twelve to grow as Bible teachers, disciple-makers and spiritual leaders. At the end of Mark’s gospel, Jesus commissioned them to go out into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Jesus had a vision that he would carry out world mission through these twelve disciples. Jesus had a vision that through this discipleship training, world mission could be carried on to all the world, and throughout the generations. Therefore success of Jesus’ work depended on the discipleship ministry. We are called to do discipleship ministry among students. We should have a clear goal to raise up spiritual leaders as we teach. It is not easy to raise up even one disciple. If we can raise up one shepherd or shepherdess in our life time, we can regard our life as a disciple-maker as success, because our work of God can be carried on.

**Second**, Jesus was opposed by the family and the Pharisees (20-34). Verses 20-34 tells about the opposition Jesus received after he had started a discipleship ministry. First, opposition from his family members: When Jesus’ family heard of Jesus sharing life together with a bunch of disciples, they thought he became so crazy. Look at verses 20-21. Jesus did not find time to eat meals because he was too busy ministering the people. He put sheep first. He often skipped lunch, ate dinner around midnight. His family member heard about his life and thought he was out of his mind. They could not understand his love for God and his shepherd heart for his people. They simply wanted him to live a nominal Christian life just like them. They complained, saying, “Why do you have to live differently from others?” They wanted to take charge of him, that means, they wanted to forcefully take him home. Of course, they acted out of concern for his life, but they acted out of ignorance because they did not experience the power of God. Family members or close friends can become a stumbling block in Christian life when they do not know God’s grace and power deeply. When we spend much time feeding sheep, or give thanksgiving offerings to God, they think we are out of our minds. But we must take a firm stand and pray for them patiently. How did Jesus view his family? Look at verses 33-35. “‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.’” This does not mean that he ignored his family. He simply taught that we Christians have a higher calling to do the will of God. Jesus accepted his disciples as his own brothers. Jesus accepted those who do the will of God as his own brothers and sisters and mother. God is our Father, and Jesus is our big brother, and those who do God’s will are all Jesus’ brothers and sisters. Look at your neighbors and welcome them, saying “My brother and my sister.”

Next, opposition from the religious leaders. How did the Pharisees think about Jesus’ ministry? Look at verse 22. They accused Jesus of driving out demons with the power of Satan. They should have recognized Jesus’ good work, but they became wicked. Jesus reputed their reasons by telling a parable. Look at verses 23-27. Satan cannot drive out demons because his kingdom cannot stand if he does so. Look at verse 27. “In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.” Who is a strong man here? Satan is strong and rules the people under his grips. But Jesus is stronger than Satan. He ties up a strong man Satan, plunders the house of Satan. Jesus came to bind up Satan and rescue sinners from his bondage, and set them free. Jesus was doing the work of God by driving out demons with the power of the Holy Spirit. This is good news of great joy. We can be set free from the power of Satan through Jesus.

Today we thought about Jesus’ calling the twelve. Jesus’ calling is his grace given to ordinary people for God’s purpose. Jesus calls us to “be with him.” Jesus changes us into holy children of God and powerful gospel workers. Jesus can use a handful of ordinary men to revive the spiritual life in this campus and in our nation.