**Jesus Appoints the Twelve Ordinary Men**

February 9, 2020

Mark 3:13-35

Key verse 3:14-15 “He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority over demons.”

If you have been to a cathedral, you probably have seen the stained glass apostles. When we think about the 12 apostles, they are typically elevated in a transcendent way somewhere just below God, or in some very prominent place, because the assumption is that these are the highest and the best and the most religiously ascended of all Christians. They are usually called St. Peter, St. John, and even St. Bartholomew. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are not nearly divine. They are not the highest, the noblest, and the best; they are not the most educated, the most highly skilled, the most gifted, humanly speaking. The truth is that they basically are distinguished by one thing, that is, they are ordinary. They have that in common. Yet Jesus called them and appointed them as apostles. Also Jesus gave them the amazing privilege of including them in his family. He is proud to call them his brothers. In a few years, they would turn the world upside down by preaching the gospel to the whole world.

**First**, Jesus appoints the twelve (13-19). In verses 7-12, we saw 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 Jesus 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 lamented, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” So 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. The reality of his death on the cross was on his mind. And the question needs to be raised, “What is going to happen after I die? Then what? Who is going to carry on? After my death, who is going to carry the message of the kingdom?” 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. None of them turned in a résumé with a list of all their achievements. But they were the ones he chose. They were the ones he wanted.

Then 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 means sand. He was shaky and emotional. He was impulsive. He could talk big, but could not back it up. But Jesus gave him nickname Peter. That means rock. Jesus had a vision that Simon would grow as rock-solid servant of God. James and John were hot-tempered--one time they asked Jesus to bring down fire on a Samaritan village because they did not welcome them. Philip was smart but too calculating; 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 son of Alphaeus is known as James the younger (Mk 15:40). Thaddeus means mama’s boy. Don’t name your son Thaddeus. Simon was a nationalistic zealot. He hated tax collectors. Only in Jesus a zealot and a tax collector can be friends. 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.

One thing striking in his selection of disciples is that there are no Pharisees. They were old wineskins, too rigid and stubborn to learn. Jesus seemed to choose those who had learning minds. The twelve disciples are perfectly ordinary men in every way. Not one of them is renowned for scholarship; not one of them is renowned for education; none of them had a track record as a good speaker or some kind of theologian. They were outsiders – total outsiders from the religious establishment of Jesus’ day. They didn’t have any particular natural talents. They don’t appear to have any particular intellectual talents. They were, on the other hand, prone to mistakes, and misjudgments, and misunderstandings, and bad attitudes, and lapses of faith, and bitter failure, and argumentativeness, and no more so than their leader Peter. And Jesus remarked that they were slow learners; they were spiritually dense; they were blockheads.

In the gospels, we see that often the twelve disciples did not know who Jesus was, or why they were following him. But they followed Jesus to the end. They were loyal to Jesus. One time, 5,000 people left Jesus after Jesus taught that he is the bread of life. They said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Jesus was greatly disappointed and asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Peter said on behalf of the Twelve, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (Jn 6:63) Sometimes when we see students with many problems, we feel burdened and wish to have clean-cut young men as disciples who have no problem at all. But there is no student without problem. As long as a student has learning minds, Jesus has a vision for him and her to grow as his disciple.

Why would Jesus choose such lowly ones? 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 says, “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong, so that no one may boast before him.” God chose the lowest of the low, the foolish. As far as the world was concerned, these 12 people didn’t even exist. As far as the religious establishment of Israel was concerned, they certainly didn’t matter. That is whom Jesus chose.

Jesus doesn’t need the wise. He doesn’t need the Pharisees. He doesn’t need the religious scholars. He is happy to show that the power is with Him so that there is never going to be any confusion about whether or not these 12 guys pulled off a world-changing event. It is the same today. Jesus still chooses ordinary men and women full of weaknesses to change the world so that there is no question about where the power comes from.

Look at verse 14. “He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.” In spite of their weaknesses, what made them great was the fact that they were with Jesus. Being with Jesus was the way Jesus trained his disciples. By being with Jesus, they learned Jesus’ person and character, including his spiritual, ethical and moral life. By being with Jesus, they imitated Jesus. There is a saying, “Like mother, like daughter.” It means that we learn to imitate our parents whether we are aware of or not. If you want to marry a woman, first visit her house and watch how her mother treats her father. That is exactly how you will be treated by her in the future. Likewise, the twelve disciples learned from Jesus by being with him. Once a man with leprosy came to Jesus begging him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” No one would dare to touch the leper, not to mention healing him. But Jesus touched the leper, saying, “I am willing. Be clean!” The disciples leaned the compassion of Jesus. Once they faced the storm but Jesus was sleeping. They panicked and said to Jesus, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” Jesus got up and rebuked the wind, “Quiet! Be still!” Jesus rebuked the disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They learned the faith from Jesus. They were with Jesus when he was crucified. Jesus said to those who were crucifying him, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” They learned from Jesus to forgive even their enemies, those who are persecuting them. Acts 4:13 says, “When they 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.” They are not secondhand eyewitnesses; they are firsthand eyewitnesses, and they are the first generation of Gospel preachers who preached the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on His work on the cross and His resurrection.

What happened to the twelve? According to tradition, everyone except John, who was exiled to the Island of Patmos, was executed. Peter was crucified upside down at his request, because he felt unworthy to be crucified as his Lord had been. His brother Andrew also was crucified - tied instead of nailed to a cross to prolong his suffering. James, the brother of John, is the only apostle whose death is recorded in the Bible. He was executed by Herod Agrippa. Philip was said to have been stoned to death in Asia Minor, but not before multitudes came to faith in Christ through his preaching. Bartholomew was bound and thrown into the sea. Matthew may have been burned at the stake. Thomas likely reached India, where some traditions say he was killed with a spear. James the son of Alphaeus was stoned to death by the Jews for preaching Christ. Simon the Zealot preached the Gospel in Egypt, North Africa, and Persia, where he was martyred by being sawn in half like Isaiah. Thaddaeus, mama’s boy, was a preacher of the Gospel in modern Turkey, and he was clubbed to death. The Gospel went over the whole world through these men and continues to do so as a legacy to their faithfulness.

**Second**, Jesus was opposed by his 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 even find time to eat meals because he was too busy ministering the people. He put people 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 studying the Bible, or praising God, they would think we are out of mind. 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. He meant that there was a deep spiritual bond with his disciples which was far greater than that with a physical family. We become closer than our physical family members. Look at your neighbors and welcome them, saying “My brother and my sister.”

Next opposition came from the religious leaders. How did the Pharisees think about Jesus’ ministry? Look at verse 22. “And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.’” They accused Jesus of driving out demons with the power of Satan. They should have recognized Jesus’ work through the Holy Spirit, but they became wicked. Jesus pointed out their nonsense. Look at verses 23-26. “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.” 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 without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house.” Here Satan is a strong man 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. He rescues 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. So anyone who accepts the power of the Holy Spirit, can be forgiven and set free from guilt of sin, and he is given freedom. But if he does not accept the work of the Holy Spirit, he endangers his chance of receiving eternal life.

Today we learned that Jesus called the twelve ordinary men to be his apostles. He included them in his family. Jesus still calls us. But in order to respond to his calling, we have to follow him and put him above our human families just as he did. Luke 14:26 says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.” Here “hate” does not mean to have hatred toward them. It means to put Jesus first above our own families just like Jesus did. May God help us to respond to Jesus’ calling and follow him so that God may use us for his world salvation work in spite of our weaknesses and ordinariness. Then God gives us the amazing privilege of including us in his family. God uses ordinary, weak and failing saints. There are no other saints. Welcome to the group.

Big Idea: Jesus appoints ordinary men and women to be his apostles