

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:14

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” 16 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 17 Then Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” 18 They immediately left their nets and followed Him. 19 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. 20 And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him. 21 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. 22 And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Mark 2:13 “Then [Jesus] went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. 14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” So he arose and followed Him. 15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. 16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, “How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?” 17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

Mark 3:13 “And [Jesus] went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. 14 Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, 15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: 16 Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; 17 James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, “Sons of Thunder”; 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; 19 and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

"Jesus Makes Disciples"

We are doing a short series from the Gospel According to Mark this year to review the life and ministry of Jesus! Last week we made the case that the simple Gospel is the fact that Jesus came to save His people from their sins which makes these Gospel accounts important and precious to us!

- It is the story of how the Son of God, the 2nd person of the eternal Trinity came as a man to save man.

We learned that we must not preach another gospel by adding to or taking away from this simple Gospel. We must accept what the Bible reveals about the person and work of Jesus if we are to know Him as our Savior.

- Ignoring Jesus or pretending He is someone other than who He claims to be does not change who He is, nor what He came to do!

However, such foolishness can certainly impact our relationship to Him and our eternal judgment. For example, having a proper understanding of gravity has kept us safe with a proper fear of high places! The study of gravity has also allowed us to soar to great heights through air travel as we have learned how to countermand the forces of gravity.

- **HOWEVER**, someone who claims that they do NOT believe in gravity does not then get to fly without engines nor step off high buildings without suffering greatly.
- Gravity is an objective reality!

The concept of gravity can be explained by simply showing a child how the book that I drop always falls to the ground or it can be studied for years by physicists who will learn more and more about it, but still have to admit that in the end much about gravity remains mysterious.

We as Christians should come to see that it is the same with the two natures of our Lord and Savior Jesus. The incarnation of Jesus can be explained to the youngest child around the simple manger scene, telling them that Jesus came as a baby to save His people from their sins! On the other hand, it can be studied by theological professors for all their lifetimes and still remain mysterious in so many ways.

- As a child we can sing and understand *Away in a Manger* and as adults we can recite the Athanasian Creed!

An important Creed that we should always keep in mind when we seek to see Jesus in the Gospel accounts: The Athanasian Creed says in part that we must “believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Essence of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Essence of his Mother, born in the world.”

In the Gospel accounts we will see Jesus living as a man in His earthly ministry for some three years. However, He never ceases to be the eternal Son of God whom the demons feared and the forces of nature obeyed. As we go through Mark’s account we will see Jesus interacting with various groups of people. There will be crowds who follow Him, women who serve Him and Romans who ruled in that time.

- The two groups that we will find Him spending the most time with are His disciples and the Pharisees.

Both of these groups are important for us to understand... The first because we are called to be followers of Jesus: His disciples today. The later because they serve to warn us about how we can easily turn from the grace of God to the tyranny of man.

- This morning we will consider His disciples and followers as reflected in the readings I have chosen.

Mark gives us some details about how Jesus called some of His disciples and in the third chapter tells us that Jesus chose twelve to be His Apostles. While some may use the terms disciple and Apostle interchangeably, we find in the New Testament that one is very narrow and the other very broad.

The term disciple is used to describe those who follow or are taught by someone. Thus there are references to the disciples of John the Baptist as well as disciples of Jesus. Jesus had many more disciples than just the twelve He chose on that mount and He had many who were faithful and some who turned back from following Him.

The term Apostle is used to refer to those who were chosen to be leaders in the early church AND who had lived and served with Jesus during His earthly ministry. The one exception to this is the Apostle Paul who refers to himself as one born out of time, not because he did not live while Jesus ministered on the earth but because he did not come to follow Him until after His ascension.

This is a very important distinction because WE are called to be disciples of Jesus today, but there are obviously no Apostles left in our time. Those who claim to be some sort of apostle, within or without the church are claiming authority or power that is simply not available to them today. However, we must also never forget that the true Church today on earth is the Church that was established on and serves upon the foundation that was laid by the Apostles.

- This is why we rejoice to sing or read the Apostle’s Creed together each Lord’s Day!

We should also understand that there is a proper Apostolic succession of power and authority that comes down to the officers serving in Christ’s Church down to our day.

This comes not through blood-lines or church history charts, but rather by the faithful transmission of the faith that was once delivered to the Saints. We do not look to a pope in the east or the west as the center of authority, but rather to the faithful elders or ministers in all of Christ's Church.

- **Just as Jesus had to do so often with His own disciples, He must continually remind the church leaders that we lead by serving rather than with power or position as the gentiles did.**

As we think about these men who were called to be the disciples of Jesus, I want us to focus on two important things:

- **The first is to see that they were men from various walks of life.**
- **The second is to remember that we too are called to be the followers of Jesus today!**

As we think back to our readings for this morning, we see that Jesus did NOT look for the religious leaders of His day to be His disciples. It was not the Pharisees nor Sadducees who were chosen but rather common men who would not be looked up to as righteous examples. In fact, Matthew the tax collector would have been seen as just the opposite which is why the 'righteous' leaders were aghast when they saw Jesus in his home eating with his friends: Tax collectors & sinners! When Jesus explains to them that did not come to save the righteous but sinners, He was not implying that there were some righteous people who did not need the salvation He had come to bring... All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God Paul declared to the Romans and this is true of ALL the children of Adam.

- **Jesus was simply saying that one needs to see their need for salvation if they are going to come with proper repentance!**

Men like those 'righteous' Pharisees were not going to benefit from the sacrifice of Jesus...

- **Not because they did not need to be saved, but rather because they thought they could save themselves by being righteous.**

And as we think about Jesus drawing these various men to Himself, we must remember that He did not just want followers while He was walking on the earth. We are reminded of this in His high priestly prayer that He lifted up on their behalf after the Last Supper just before He went to give Himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

John 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 24 Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, & I in them."

Here we see again profound truth that can be stated as simply as the words of the most famous children's song: 'Jesus loves me this I know' or studied and meditated on for the rest of our lives never being able to fully probe the depths of such great truth.

- **Jesus has chosen to reveal the Father through His disciples!**

Could God have done things a different way? Surely He could have:

He might have simply cast Adam and Eve into hell and started over.

He could have sent Jesus as a sacrifice for Noah and his family after the flood so they would have had only righteous descendants.

Jesus as the eternal Son of God could make a personal appearance to every man and women that He wants to be with He and the Father forever so there would be no need for a Bible or disciples.

And thinking of those first disciples, Jesus could certainly found a 12th disciple who would NOT betray Him.

We could go on and on and spend a lot of time and effort with such speculation and sadly many do just that. However, IF we would know Jesus; we must come to Him on His terms and not ours...

- The Gospel accounts are there so we can know that Jesus came to save His people from their sins!
- It is there that we meet the man Jesus and learn what it means to be His followers!

My heartfelt prayer is that each and every one of us will grow to know Him better and better each and every day of our lives and that we would learn to be His faithful followers today. None of us will be sinless, but each of us can serve our Holy God because when we come to the Father through the Savior, He sees us through the perfect righteousness of His beloved Son.

- Such was certainly the case with these early disciples who left everything to follow Jesus.

They were often filled with pride, arguing among themselves about who would have the best position. They were full of doubts and even got their theology so wrong that Peter had to be rebuked as a front for Satan. They even experienced a great betrayer among them who they thought was just another follower like them. Jesus chose these common men and made them Apostles to establish the teaching foundation that His Church would be built upon.

Today, we are not called to such service, but we are still called to be His followers as His Kingdom continues to advance until it fills all the earth.

- Jesus prayed that we would be one with He and the Father just as these men were at that time!

I want to close this morning with just a brief summary of who these men were and how they served their Lord and Savior... There are three disciples who were part of an inner circle that joined Jesus on the mount of transfiguration and in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane:

The first two were the sons of Zebedee the fisherman: James, a fisherman himself who lived in Bethsaida, Capernaum and Jerusalem. He preached in Jerusalem and Judea & was beheaded by Herod, A.D. 44. He was the first of the twelve to become a martyr and the only one whose death is actually recorded in the Scriptures.

His brother John was known as that Beloved Disciple. A fisherman who also lived in Bethsaida, Capernaum and Jerusalem. John wrote five New Testament books and preached among the churches of Asia Minor. Banished to the Isle of Patmos, he was later freed & is the only disciple thought to have died a natural death.

Simon Peter, son of Jonas, is often seen as the leader of the disciples, but not in the Church at Jerusalem. He did evangelistic and missionary work among the Jews, and was the first to go to the Gentiles. The Greek meaning of Simon is rock. The Arabic meaning of Cephas is also rock. By trade, Peter was a fisherman. He was a married man & his home was Capernaum. Peter had many faults, but Jesus prayed for him in his greatest hour of need & comforted him on the morning of His resurrection. Even after Peter was filled with the Spirit at Pentecost and became a great leader in the early Church we are reminded by the Apostle Paul that he was still not beyond making mistakes as he did when he refused to eat with some Gentile believers.

Tradition holds that Peter was martyred on a cross requesting that he be crucified head downward arguing that he was not worthy to die as his Lord had died.

Andrew was the brother of Peter, and a son of Jonas. He lived in Bethsaida and Capernaum and was a fisherman before he was called by Jesus. Andrew introduced others to Jesus like his brother Peter and the Greeks who we considered at last week.

According to tradition, Andrew died a martyr in Patra Greece. When Governor Aepeas' wife was healed and converted to the Christian faith, and shortly after that the Governor's brother became a Christian, Aepeas was enraged. He arrested Andrew and condemned him to die on the cross. Andrew, also feeling unworthy to be crucified on the same-shaped cross as his Master, begged that his be different. So, he was crucified on an X-shaped cross, which is still called Saint Andrew's cross today.

Bartholomew lived in Cana of Galilee. His first name was Nathanael, whom Jesus called "An Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" Tradition says he was a missionary in Armenia. The Armenian Church claims him as its founder and martyr. However, some tradition says that he preached in India, and his death seems to have taken place there.

James, the Lesser or Younger, son of Alpheus, lived in Galilee. According to tradition he wrote the Epistle of James, preached in Palestine and Egypt where he was crucified.

Thaddeus, also known as Judas the brother of James or Lebbeus, was a brother of James the Younger and lived in Galilee. Tradition says he preached in Assyria and Persia and died a martyr in Persia.

Thaddeus asked Jesus at the Last Supper, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?"

Matthew, or Levi, son of Alpheus, lived in Capernaum. He was a publican or tax collector. He could use a pen, and by his pen he became the first man to present to the world an account of the teachings of Jesus. Christianity owes a great debt to this despised tax gatherer for his Account of the Gospel. The average man would have thought it impossible to reform Matthew, but to God all things are possible.

Tradition holds that he died a martyr in Ethiopia.

Philip came from Bethsaida, the town from which Peter and Andrew came and may also have been a fisherman. The Gospel of John shows Philip as one of the first of many to whom Jesus addressed the words, "Follow Me." When Philip met Christ, he immediately discovered Nathanael and told him that "we have found him, of whom Moses . . . and the prophets, did write." Nathanael was skeptical. Philip did not argue with him; he simply answered, "Come and see." Tradition holds that Phillip died by hanging.

Simon, the Zealot, was called a Canaanite. The New Testament gives us practically nothing on him personally except that it says he was a Zealot. As such he would have been a man devoted to the Law, a man with bitter hatred for anyone who dared to compromise with Rome, especially a Roman tax collector like Matthew.

Simon, the Zealot, the man who once would have killed in loyalty to Israel, became the man who saw that God will have no forced service. Tradition says he died as a martyr.

Thomas Didymus lived in Galilee. Thomas was his Hebrew name and Didyrnus was his Greek name. At times he was called Judas. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us nothing about Thomas except his name. However, John defines him more clearly in his Gospel. Thomas was ready to die with Jesus before the raising of Lazarus and in the Upper Room he wanted to know how to know the way where Jesus was going.

After the resurrection, we see him saying unless he sees the nail prints in Jesus' hand and the gash of the spear in His side he will not believe. Thus the name Doubting Thomas. When Jesus appeared again he invited Thomas to put his finger in the nail prints in his hands and in his side. Here, we see Thomas making the greatest confession of faith, "My Lord and my God." Thomas' doubts were transformed into faith.

Tradition holds that he was commissioned to build a palace for the king of India, and he was killed with a spear as a martyr for his Lord.

And finally we have Judas Iscariot, the traitor, who was the son of Simon who lived in Kerioth of Judah. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and afterwards hanged himself.

Many see Judas as the supreme enigma of the New Testament because it is so hard to see how anyone who was so close to Jesus, who saw so many miracles and heard so much of the Master's teaching could ever betray him into the hands of his enemies.

But as we saw in our text this morning, Jesus knew from the very beginning that he would in the end betray Him.

- **His treachery was no surprise to Jesus!**
- **We could add to some of the earlier speculations that I listed by wondering why we do not know more than we do about these men.**

We must trust that God the Holy Spirit has given us all that we need to know in the Scriptures He has inspired and the history that is recorded..

These men join the witnesses of the Old Testament who have gone before who are listed in the 11th chapter of Hebrews as our examples.

May we always heed the call which the writer immediately gives in chapter twelve:

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Communion Meditation: Mark 14

“18 Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." 19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?" 20 He answered and said to them, "It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. 21 The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born." 22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 23 Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. 25 Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.””