

# The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

## *The Twelve*

Luke 6.12-16

February 5, 2017

*It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup> And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: <sup>14</sup> Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; <sup>15</sup> and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; <sup>16</sup> Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

We're looking at the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John... we usually do this between Christmas and Easter...and it gives us the opportunity to get reacquainted with the main Character of the Christian faith...whom Christians think of as the Hero of the human story.

We're looking at the cast of characters around Jesus Christ...a lot of very colorful, complex, often odd and interesting persons. For the most part, they are a kind of cross-section of humanity (though...as we've seen... they are NOT all human...get the sermon from a few weeks ago).

They lived in the ancient world... the Roman Empire, the land of Israel... and that seems very different to us but mostly, they have problems similar to OUR own problems... their make up is like ours.

Today we drop in on a group of these people... all of whom are supporters of Jesus Christ and who are in the inner circle. They are disciples... in fact these few sermons pick up on this THEME of being a disciple...and these are the TWELVE DISCIPLES whom Jesus appoints and names as "APOSTLES".

The Christian Church has, from the time of Jesus Christ, has referred to itself as the "Apostolic Church" – the church that carries forward the teaching and tradition and the Way of the Apostles... We build on their foundation... The final book of the Bible describes the New Jerusalem and it says, "the wall of the City had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Rev 21.14)

What do we learn about Jesus Christ by looking at the leaders of His movement? How did their Leader shape and develop them? What does it mean to be modern disciples of Jesus Christ in

“the Apostolic Church”? Let’s look at The Twelve – 1) who they were, 2) why they were chosen and 3) what it says about being a disciple in the Apostolic Church.

They are listed four times (Matt, Mk, Luke, Acts) and each time there’s a little variety.

People went by a variety of names in that time/place and had nicknames and other identifiers (like jobs or parentage or place of origin). Matthew also goes by Levi... Simon goes by Peter.

Two of the list, James and John, may have been first cousins of Jesus Christ... (sons of Zebedee who was married to Salome, sister of Mary, mother of Jesus).

All but one were from the Northern part of Israel and the region of Galilee... Judas is apparently NOT.

Their names appear to be arranged in three groups of four...the best-known four...then the middle-known and the least-known...including the notorious Judas who’s called “the traitor” or “the one who betrayed Him”.

Some of them were leaders... Peter, Andrew, James and John... and others are virtually unknown... but all their names are inscribed on the foundation stones of the City of God.

There’s a lot of tradition...and even early writings about some of them...Thomas (“the twin” and “the doubter”) is thought to have carried the Gospel to India. All but Judas who took his own life... all are said to have been martyred... but John, who apparently died on a prison island (where he did make good use of his time!)

Why were they chosen? Well, let me think about that in terms of function, significance, qualifications and mystery.

Functionally, they would be the PLAN... they would be given authority and the things they saw Jesus Christ DO – they would be given power to DO... to show by their own hands, their own actions, they would demonstrate what the Reign of God looks like: “This is what happens when God steps in to reclaim the fallen world – sicknesses are healed, evil spirits that torment/enslave people and spoil the world ARE BANISHED!” And these apostles are given authority to do signs and wonders that SHOW GOD’S KINGDOM – His reign over the broken world.

If you read the whole section in Matthew CH 10, you’ll see that they’re to live and proceed in faith – they take NOTHING with them... but totally depend on God’s provision. Their very lives are testament to the Reign of God...

AND their ministry is decisive... in other words, when they go out into the villages and teach and announce the kingdom of God...when people welcome and accept their NEWS...that will

determine that person's spiritual welfare... To embrace their message is to embrace the One who sent them. Apostle means "one who is sent" – more than a messenger, it's an ambassador who speaks for the King. Reject the ambassador and you are rejecting the King.

Later, Jesus Christ will give them the "keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16.19) meaning that they will decide together what the message of the Kingdom really IS. They will be so filled and guided by the God's Spirit that they define who is IN and who is OUT... They will make sense of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and present it to the world... that's what we're reading when we read the New Testament - it's the authorized version...it's the terms of the Great Treaty as presented by the Ambassadors!

And, symbolically these are the heads of the restored Israel. Later He says to them, "you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel." (Mat 19.28) This is how God will fulfill Israel's mission by USING these TWELVE APOSTLES to gather in all the people of God. Twelve – a significant number... they will be the restored Israel and everyone who believes their testimony is included!

It's such an important number for God's whole plan that when one of them died...(Acts 1) he had to be replaced – that number had to be TWELVE!

And they are...a company...a community... The way Jesus Christ constituted them is significant. He draws from ONE region of the world (Israel and Galilee) but He makes them astoundingly diverse.

On His team...Jesus Christ puts a Right-Wing EXTREMIST and a Left-Wing FANATIC! Simon the Zealot was a member of a violent Pro-Jewish terrorist network devoted to getting rid of the Romans and Matthew WORKED for the Romans!

And this is significant in that when I come into the Church I will find myself sitting next to people who WILL BE VERY DIFFERENT FROM ME... people who would be my natural enemies... and Jesus Christ weaves that into the Founders of Restored Israel.

It's there from the start... people who come into this apostolic church can only BE HERE IF THEY COME TO KNOW A BASIS FOR UNITY that transcends the most deeply rooted differences and disparities.

No wonder the first Apostle, Simon Peter would later write to church members, some from Jewish backgrounds and others who were Gentiles, "for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY." (1Peter 2.10)

Peter and the others would see... “Jesus Christ, has lived the obedient and morally beautiful life of perfect love...and did that for people who just never get it right...never finish the “to-do list”. He DID what we fail to DO! He finished our list: “It is finished!”

He died for the sins of guilty people...and WE ARE ALL GUILTY...Jews and Gentiles... rich and poor... educated and ignorant...right-wingers, left-wingers and moderates...all are IN THE SAME CATEGORY – the guilty. And Jesus Christ came into the world to carry the guilt of His people... NO ONE CAN GET RID OF HIS OR HER GUILT – we’re all in the same boat!

That’s why He put on His original team – people who could NO WAY get along... they had to see from the start that we are, EVERY ONE OF US – totally disqualified...and in need of grace!

And when these Apostles...with all their extremes and their hang ups...when they saw Him rise from the dead... they would be the eyewitnesses to the world...to say, “We saw Him...spoke with Him...heard and touched Him...HE IS ALIVE AND ATONEMENT is made...believe it...receive it...come alive!”

And in some wonderful and awful mystery... even as He was calling these unqualified bumbler and “slow to believe” often arrogant and often clueless young men (and some say that they may have been in their teens and twenties!) – in the mix, Jesus Christ calls one... whom He alone knows to be a traitor.

In the calling of the twelve...one will be welcomed as a friend who would TURN ON HIM...and send Him to the Cross...and that horrible betrayal, that Cross... would be the salvation of everyone who believes.

Someone has said that the Twelve was the Church in miniature. Jesus reconstituted Israel, the Apostolic Church with a bunch of rough-cut, raw people who were astounded by this Person...the God-Man who controlled the winds and the waves and made blind men see...and opened their eyes to see...a group of young men (maybe, as I said, maybe very young!) who could NO WAY get along unless they saw how really messed up they ALL were – so messed up that God had to become a Man and die for them...

The Apostolic Church...is a Church built on the teaching and testimony of these eyewitnesses...but it’s also a church that is “apo-stello” i.e. SENT.

We too are SENT into the world...as witnesses...and the only thing that makes us qualified...is that we see how really DISQUALIFIED we are!

And like them, the original twelve...we are WILLING...because, as they will later say, “Where else can we go? YOU ALONE have the words of eternal life!” (John 6.68) We are willing because we are desperate...and because we believe that Jesus Christ can help us...ONLY HE can help us.

He spent the entire night in prayer to His Father...then He appointed the Twelve...leadership is important... In some sense, He entrusted the fate of the world to THEM! These teen-agers...and unstable, half-baked bumble-heads and rookies... BUT...He also committed to THEM...committed everything to THEM.

He trained them...He showed them...lived with them ... lived for them...died for them...rose again from the dead FOR THEM...and then poured out His Spirit on them. No wonder their critics said, "These men have turned the world upside down!" (Acts 17.6)

That's what it means to be in the Apostolic Church – people made willing because they're desperate... and clinging to the One we heard about from the Apostles' witness... the One who brings weird people together...people who learn to boast ONLY in Him and in God's grace...people who are being renovated and changed and made useful... people "apo-stello", SENT into the world.

If you haven't joined us...why not? He will take you on...He will commit to shape and develop and make you all you were meant to be... and will send you (along with these other ragamuffins) SENT into the world to serve...to testify... But FIRST you have to despair of saving and ruling yourself...and you have to make your boast in Him alone.

### **The Communion**

There's a warning against taking the Lord's Supper in the wrong way – see end of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians CH 11 – St Paul said if a person does not judge the body rightly...." We, interpret that to mean "If a person doesn't understand what the Church is, the Body of Christ... So, if you are not a member of a church (keeping aloof) if you're not connected to a group of people...a local church, you're not judging the significance and importance of the church...and we're passing on the warning to you...

In that same passage...St Paul pointed to what we've talked about today...that the Church is built on the transmission of truth...the witness of the Apostles that's handed down as a treasure from one generation of Christians to the next. Listen: "For I received from the Lord that which I also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (23-24)

See? The apostolic church is given this treasure...the apostles received it and pass it on: "For I received from the Lord that which I also PASSED ON to you."

Here, we participate in this treasure...it's this simple meal where we join with Jesus Christ and His Apostles in that upper room...and WE, together with THEM, eat grace...we take Jesus Christ as He's offered...our faith digests grace as our mouths eat the bread and drink the wine.

He is the Host and He IS THE MEAL...He gives Himself to US and we are just desperate enough to eat...

WE NOW INTERNALIZE Jesus Christ ...as they did and as they passed on to us...to continue in this tradition until Jesus Christ returns and when the whole Apostolic Church is all gathered in for a feast that will never end.

As we have been taught...in the faith once passed on to all the saints (Jude 1.3)...as the Apostles passed on to the Church LET US EAT...and receive sustaining grace.