

## 14 June 2020, The Fifth Sunday of Pentecost: Matthew 9:35-10:8 (Prop 6)

I must have been about 9 years old; it was the first day of classes at the little school I attended. I had walked up what seemed like many steps to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, rounded the corner at the top of the stairs and my eyes fell on a large bronze plaque extending many feet above me. There were names on the plaque, names of those who had attended the little school, and who had been killed in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War.

I do not remember how many names were on the memorial; it seemed like a lot to my young mind. Some of the family names I recognized; but even so they were just names: they had attended the school, grown up, gone to war, and never came back; dead by wounds or disease or accident. Yet whatever they did, however they died, was important; and someone, probably a group of someone's, wanted school children to know that others had gone before, that the lives of a bunch of scruffy kids in a small Michigan town were somehow built on what they did, how they lived and what they died for.

We have a kind of memorial plaque today in the Gospel reading. It seems mundane doesn't it: *These are the names of the twelve apostles: first Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.* A list of names. We fool ourselves if we think we know them. For a tiny minority there are all too brief hints of their characters in the New Testament, and there are stories in the Church's tradition. The fact is: we know a little about some of them, and virtually nothing about most of Jesus' earliest followers.

So, why bother with a list of names? Why did Gospel writers take the time and expend the ink on the names? Why do we read the list of names in Church?

This passage is a turning point in Matthew's Gospel. From Chapter 4 through most of Chapter 9, Jesus defines by word and example His Messianic ministry through the Sermon on the Mount, multiple parables, and healing the sick. He gathers followers but they are passive. Now, Jesus calls His disciples to participate in and dramatically widen the scope of His own ministry. For the first and only time in Matthew's Gospel the twelve are called *Apostles*: which means those who are sent.

The list of names is important, reminding us God chooses to reveal His love, peace, and mercy within creation. God does not, as it were, stand outside creation, sending instructions, expecting us to work it out on your own. God sent the only begotten to announce, inaugurate and bring the Kingdom of God. Jesus calls us to share and widen His ministry through our lives. A little saying I learned some time ago summarizes a great truth: Without God, I cannot; without me, God will not. Jesus invites us to share in God's great plan of redemption for the world; and the Holy Spirit teaches, empowers, and strengthens us to do so. We are to proclaim by word and action the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. We are commissioned and empowered to bring God's healing, hope, and restoration to our environments and relationships.

The Apostles are named two by two. This is the way for participating in the expansion of God's kingdom. It is a perennial temptation—for laity and clergy—to think one's ministry is one's own. We can guard our ministry jealously, use it for our ego needs, draw attention to ourselves in a very humble way, and feel under-appreciated if no one notices how hard we are so humbly working. Yet, ministry is never just ministry for or to others; we are called by Jesus to serve *with*: ministry with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; ministry with our fellow-human ministers. One sign of spiritual maturity is that we have as much joy at the accomplishments of others as we do over what God is doing through us.

One more observation: Jesus said to them, *You received without payment; give without payment.* All that Jesus calls us to share—forgiveness, hope, healing, salvation, love—all of it is pure gift. We received grace from Jesus and from our spiritual forbearers freely; we can only pass it on as a free gift. While the one who brings the gifts surely embodies the gifts, the gifts themselves are always more important than the one who brings them. The more we freely share the grace of Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the more truly we confirm our call to apostolic ministry.

Your names are written, not on some bronze plaque; your name is written in God's eternal kingdom. Amen.