

Third Weekend after Pentecost (RCL/A): "Who, ME??"
Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:23
June 13-14, 2026
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

There's just no understanding the people God chooses to do holy work in this world! Look at the list of apostles in today's Gospel. The line leader, the first person to be named in the place of honor is Simon Peter, who's going to star in a triple header of denial that he even **knows** Jesus of Nazareth, when the heat is on after the arrest. The last person in line is Judas Iscariot, who is, the evangelist helpfully notes, "*the one who betrayed him*" (Matt. 9:4). Sandwiched in between we've got Matthew the tax collector, whom we mentioned last week had the most hated job possible for a Jew: working for the Romans and extorting money from his own countrymen. In the mix we also have Simon the Cananaean, whom we usually hear referred to as Simon the Zealot. Why would Jesus, the "Prince of Peace," call someone to follow Him who was basically a terrorist, part of a group vowing to violently overthrow Roman rule of Palestine? 3 of the others, Andrew, James and John, were fishermen, for Heaven's sake. What formal religious creds did **they** bring to the table?

What possible qualifications did these guys have? Would they have been the pick of the litter in the 21st century if they used their LinkedIn profiles to apply for the job of disciple? We hear stories all the time about people applying for not just **dozens** but **hundreds** of jobs and not ever getting even an acknowledgement or a "Sorry, the position's been filled" e-mail in return. Would the twelve Jesus chose **then** have risen like cream to the top **today**?? Probably. God's ways are **so** not our ways. God judges **so** differently than we do. All we can really guess is that Jesus **still** chooses the people whom we would least expect.

It's no small job our Lord called His followers to. And not just the twelve: the **seventy**, as we hear in St. Luke's Gospel (ch. 10). Jesus isn't just asking the apostles (and other disciples) to

manage the crowds, leaving the healings, exorcisms and preaching up to Him. Jesus says, **you** *“proclaim the good news... Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons...”* (Matt. 10:7-8a) He calls them to do **everything** He’s doing, except the dying and rising. (Although that comes later for many of them; tradition says that 11 out of 12 apostles were martyred, giving up their lives for the faith.)

At some point or other, we’ve all been asked to do something we felt incapable of. The request sounded like Mission Impossible, and we immediately counted ourselves out and looked over our shoulder for the other person they must be talking to. Then we realized: “This person is talking to me. But **why**? There’s no way on earth I can do what they’re asking. Are they **crazy**?”

Sometimes we’re right and it’s a poor match. The person asking may be desperate to fill a need and not familiar enough with our personality or gifts. But **more** often, someone on the outside looking in sees us better than we see ourselves and recognizes a spiritual gift in us that we haven’t discovered yet. Maybe the task isn’t so far-fetched after all; we think we can’t do it simply because we haven’t done it before. If our kids say something like that we tell them, “How do you **know** you can’t do it unless you try? You might surprise yourself.” We’re never too old to stop discovering things about ourselves and to cultivate new talents.

Lemme be honest and say I understand people’s reticence to take on responsibility in the church. True confessions: in my early 30’s I was asked by someone on the nominating committee of the Lutheran Church in the Woods, Riverwoods, IL, where I was a member, to help chair the Christian Education Committee and serve on the Congregation Council. They must have had such high hopes, since I’d already been a high school religion teacher.... But those couple years of teaching had **not** been an especially happy experience for me. I thought, “Are you crazy??” And despite the fact that I am usually an inveterate people-pleaser, I immediately and emphatically

said, “**No** -- but thank you for thinking of me.” ☺ I was in full-time chaplaincy and I was going to seminary part-time, so I’m not wracked with guilt when I remember declining that invitation. But I also realize my fellow parishioners saw something in me that I did not see in myself **yet**. These days I’d say I do “okay” serving on Council, I can hold my own teaching a class, and I hope my presence on our Youth & Family Ministry is a “value added” kind of thing. I’ve learned (on good days) to consider the possibility that others can see gifts in me that I haven’t yet recognized but that are real. So I ask you: leave open the possibility there are gifts God has given you that you haven’t discovered yet.

I bring all this up because of Jesus’ diagnosis of a problem in today’s Gospel: “*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*” (Matt. 9:37) Ask **anyone** who volunteers in **any** way in our faith family: “Are there enough people doing what you do?” I’ll bet you the answer will be “No.” I **do** believe if the Lord **intends** for something to happen the Holy Spirit **enables** it to happen, **empowers** it to happen through us. But it does take **all** of us, each contributing our bit.

We’re **all** called, in Holy Baptism, to [quote] “trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.”¹ We have many chances, each day, within and beyond these walls, to “proclaim Christ through word and deed,” even to “cure the sick” and “cast out demons” if we don’t get too literal about it. Some among us **literally** cure the sick, but the rest of us also have multiple opportunities to cure the sickness of loneliness in our neighborhoods, work places and schools, to support loved ones, friends, coworkers who are struggling to get into or remain in recovery, “casting out the demon” of addiction, so to speak. If you think that Deacon Ned, Peter Seggel and I are the only ones who have a **vocation**, a holy calling, in our faith family, you’re mistaken! **We all receive God’s holy call in**

Baptism. Fr. Ted Hesburgh was the president of Notre Dame when I studied there in the 70's. He was forever telling the student body, filled with up-and-coming leaders, "Take Christ into the board room with you." Love what God loves, do what God wants, whether you're in this sanctuary, at home, at the gym, at work, in the classroom, on the playing field, at home or on vacation. "Take Christ with you." Live your faith out loud, not necessarily in words, but definitely in actions.

Jesus lays out pretty clearly some of the dangers that go along with living our faith out loud. He's **so** clear we could wonder, "Who'd sign on for an assignment like that??" But Jesus indicates the Lord of the harvest will be listening for and answering our prayers. He assures us that we go out in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit:

"...do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Matt. 10:19-20)

Jesus also makes the divine promise: *"the one who endures to the end will be saved."* (Matt. 10:22b)

The first disciples didn't **earn** their salvation by answering Jesus' call, by faithfully serving and suffering, or by being martyred. **Jesus** paid the price, they didn't. Everything that followed their answer to His call was an expression of gratitude, not a bid for salvation. They did **open up** heart and hands to **accept** the invitation and the gift He offered. They dared to imagine He saw something worthwhile, beautiful, useful in them that they hadn't. He sees something worthwhile, beautiful, useful in you, too. Dare to imagine **that**. Dare to **believe** it if someone else suggests it.

Amen

¹*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), p. 228.

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