

Disciples preparing for mission
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Like a good author, the doctor Luke makes a transition in his account of Jesus' ministry. He's about to pivot in somewhat of a new direction. I say *somewhat* because he's still in the introductory phase of highlighting what Jesus is like. We're still in that spot in Luke's writings where he's helping us learn who Jesus is and what Jesus is about. Soon, at the end of chapter 9 after we all have a handle on who Jesus is, Luke focuses more specifically on Jesus' divine mandate, which is to go to Jerusalem and to suffer for the salvation of God's people. But now, introducing Jesus to the readers is Luke's primary concern.

Next Sunday, we are going to begin looking at Jesus' teaching to learn more about him and his way. So far this is what we've learned: 1) Jesus is the promised Messiah and Servant of God, born of a virgin according to the prophets and properly prepared to succeed where Israel has failed. 2) We've also learned that Jesus has begun a ministry just like Isaiah said he would; the servant of God who heals the sick, who releases the captives and who proclaims good news to the poor. And Luke proves that by telling us time and again all the different miracles Jesus has performed. Lastly, we've learned that Jesus' mission comes in conflict with the authority and teaching of the religious establishment. Conflict is already brewing; in fact, just last week we learned that the religious leaders are plotting ways to get rid of this... problem.

Next, it's Jesus' teaching. What does Jesus say? What does he teach people to do? As you will see, it's far more radical than we even care to admit. But *who* is Jesus' teaching? Is Jesus teaching the crowds? His disciples? Just the 12? Does he have words of correction for his enemies? Just who is he about to teach?

Well, imagine our time this morning, for example. Who's the audience of our times when we gather? Here's what I think the scriptures teach and the example they give: teach the saints. Teach the people of God; remind them and instruct them about God. But do it in such a way that those who are searching and seeking can hear, listen and join God's family in faith. Also, teach in such a way that the antagonists, the hard-hearted can be challenged and convicted. So get this, my brothers and sisters: God's words, his ways and teachings are for everyone; for us this morning, there isn't a person here who this isn't for. But not everyone receives it in the same way. The faithful, Jesus' disciples, receive them as holy words handed down to us by God's Spirit. We live off his words, we drink the truth found therein. We shrivel up and die without them. Those who are seeking receive God's teachings and wisdom as an invitation into life. Jesus' words beckon seekers saying, "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" And those who are antagonistic, those who are hostile to Jesus' words, his teachings convict, his words even condemn people in their rebellion and unbelief.

Let's take a peek at these transitional verses as we gear up to hear the teachings of Jesus about his way whoever we may be (READ Luke 6:12-19).

Notice a few nuggets of information. First, notice the preparation of Jesus in the selection of his apostles and his preparation for his teachings (READ vs. 12). We've been seeing Jesus do this, haven't we? Bathing his work in prayer. At the end of ch. 4, Jesus went away and prayed. In ch. 5, same thing... Jesus went to pray. Again, now, Jesus went to the mountain to pray and continued in prayer all night.

Have you ever done that? Prayer like that isn't so much a decision; do you know what I mean by that? Every week Korby and I have a plan of attack on how to get accomplished what we need to do. On a week by week basis, she carries the heavy load as our principal domestic engineer and I try to fill in some of the gaps where it's helpful. If we had our druthers, we'd probably spend our time differently. We might prefer to go floating on the lake; we might go out for dinner. But, because we know we have things to get done, we make the choice to the hard, unglamorous work that's required. You can only pray so much like that. You can work some discipline in your life to pray when you don't want to, when you'd rather be watching TV or going for a morning walk - in fact, you must. But that only works so much. Prayer like this, night and day prayer, is birthed by an acute awareness of your need for God. And even more than that; not just an awareness of your need, but a desire for God.

Do you have that? Are you aware of your need for God so much that you would be willing (even glad) to give up leisure time to plead for God's help? Are you humble enough, do you know your frame in such a way where you know that without the power of the Almighty you are toast? And more, do you desire his power, his grace, his compassion, his fellowship where you want to plead to him?

That's where I want to be. You can't will that; you can't grit your teeth hard enough to make that happen. That's a work of God's grace as you humbly submit more and more to him and he shows you, reveals to you, your need and his beauty more and more.

Jesus is there; he knows his Father (clearly) and time with God is desirable to him. But look at the need. He's about to select the 12. That's an important decision; these 12 will be instrumental in the formation of the church. It's interesting how that's worded; look at vs. 13, "And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles." So, notice: Jesus had more than 12 disciples. From all his disciples, Luke says, he picked these 12. Now, we know the importance these 12 play in the life and ministry of Jesus. But Jesus had more people who were ready and willing to give up their life and learn from Jesus. That's what a disciple is; a disciple is a learner. Someone willing to follow the teachings and the ways of this rabbi named Jesus and take on his life. The goal of every disciple was to be like his rabbi and at least at this moment, he has many of them.

But notice what he does with the 12; it says he chose them and named them apostles. That's significant. Anytime anyone is named something, there's intent behind the name. By naming these 12 apostles, Jesus is giving them a greater description of their identity and calling.

The name apostle will shape their future lives. So, what's an apostle? The word apostle means *messenger*; maybe more specifically, *delegate sent with a message*. A delegate is an authorized representative. The Democratic and Republican parties have delegates from each state and those delegates are officially recognized as representatives of those states. They cast votes, they make statements or speeches on behalf of those who sent them.

These 12 disciples have been given the name apostle. That means Jesus is now conveying upon them more than merely the task of learning his excellent way, but also spreading it as his authorized representatives. In a few chapters, he's going to send them out on their first delegation; they are going to go and spread his news and put their new name into action. Now, this job isn't reserved for just the 12. It's not like he took 12 out of the many, only made them delegates and none of his other disciples have to worry about that. We learn in Luke 10 that he has a larger group, the 72, and sends them out in the exact same way. So, we have to hold these two things together. On the one hand, Jesus has 12 disciples that are particularly close and connected to him. But Jesus had more disciples than that and he actually had the same plan and mission for them all; he sends all of his disciples out as messengers, as authorized representatives.

Here's the big idea that I want you to know and embrace this morning: being a disciple of Jesus Christ, following the Lord, includes the identity and the task of messenger, as delegate. Or put another way: You can't be a disciple and reject or refuse the missional aspect of delegate. Disciples always, always are called and charged to represent and speak on behalf of the Lord.

Now, get this: this isn't an option. Even if you cross your arms and dig your heels in saying, "No thanks, Jesus. I like coming to church; I like studying the Bible. I like listening to Christian music. I'll even go to a potluck or two. But I'm not going to be your delegate" you are one. You can't escape it. You are his delegate; you are his representative. The only question is: what kind of delegate will you be?

We Wisconsinites have mixed feelings about (PIC) Seattle Seahawks Russell Wilson (well, most of us do). On the one hand, he's a Badger and he did a fantastic job in just one year in Madison. On the other hand, he's beaten the Packers a time or two. Some of you may also know that Russell professes faith in Christ. And this faith has been a topic of conversation in the media this past week. Russell was interviewed at a church in California and his girlfriend came up and Russell told the California congregation that he and his girlfriend have said they will date God's way. Now, if you are wondering exactly what he meant by that, Russell made it clear. He was talking about sex. And as hard as it is, as counter cultural as it is, he said their goal was to abstain from sexual activity unless they are married (that is God's way, my friends).

Now, why am I bringing this up? The media got wind of what he shared in this religious setting and guess what... everybody has an opinion about it. And predictably, those who do not have the mind of Christ, those who reject Jesus and are living secular lives, think this is stupid

and old-fashioned. Russell was representing Jesus... he's always representing Jesus and so are you.

Did you know what you post on facebook and how you interact with people on social media represents Jesus; you are his delegate in that moment? What you share, how you share is saying something about Jesus because you are his delegate, his representative. People are forming impressions and opinions about Jesus by how you represent him. So, what are you saying online? And how are you saying it? How you treat servers in restaurants gives them an impression about Jesus. They know. I read a sad article a year ago titled, "Why are Christians bad tippers?" The article didn't just talk about the lousy tips some Christians give, but it also recorded accounts from waiters and waitresses about the church crowds. Demanding, rude and patronizing were words used to describe some holy rollers in restaurants. People see us pray before meals. People can hear our conversations about matters of faith. They know. I had breakfast with somebody at Medford Cafe probably 2 or 3 years after moving to Medford and when we were about to order the waitress asked, "So, what will it be, pastor?" I looked up in shock; how did she know I was a pastor? She knew... she also most certainly new I was the BAPTIST pastor! When you cheer for your kids in sports, you represent Jesus. When you are doing business deals, you are representing Jesus. You and I as followers Christ are always representing Jesus. That's the way Jesus designed it. He named his disciples apostles. That includes you.

How can we do that well? If you're like me you are probably thinking, "I want to be a good delegate, a good representative... a faithful messenger." First, let's talk big picture and then let's get specific. First, the only way you and I can be faithful, gracious and effective delegates and representatives of Jesus is if it is our way of life. We can't fake this. This is not a part we can play day after day, week after week. A good tree bears good fruit and bad tree bears bad fruit. If you want to consistently bear good fruit (be a good representative and delegate for Jesus) then your life needs to be flowing with the vibrancy of the Spirit of God. You can't will this; you can't wake up in the morning, grit your teeth and make it happen. God makes it happen by his grace. So, maybe I can say it this way: if you want to consistently be an effective representative of Jesus live authentically Christian lives. How do you do that? By seeking Christ. By pursuing him. Keep turning away from the things of the world and turn to Christ. Remember how you got saved? Remember how you humbled yourself, confessed your need and pursued Christ? Keep doing that. Do you remember how Paul said, "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in him?" That's what you do. So, don't worry about the checklist. Don't make bigger, more passionate commitments and promises. Seek Christ in the scriptures, seek Christ through your church family and God will work in you his life.

But what do you do when you mess up? Nobody is perfect, right? It doesn't take long for me to recall ways that I have not represented Jesus well to my family, to my neighbors and the community at large. Here's another way you represent Jesus well. You confess. You repent. You humbly acknowledge your failure and look to provide restitution. What better way to

demonstrate our commitment and faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus than trusting and banking on the forgiveness God provides?

Saying, "I'm sorry;" confessing sin on your own because you know it's the right thing to do, it's the gospel thing to do, changes people in radical ways. It's amazing to see reconciliation happen in relationships. They always and only happen when someone is willing humble themselves and say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Do you forgive me?" If there are any people in the world who should be quick to apologize it should be followers of Jesus. And when we do, we represent and highlight the glory of Christ.