

Message Delivered at Christ Church  
Saturday & Sunday, June 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011

TEXT: Acts 1:6-14

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So it's summertime, everybody! And one of the things that happens in summertime, y'all, is Vacation Bible School. And one of the things you do in Vacation Bible School is sing Bible songs. So...I got an old school Bible School song for you this morning, and it goes a little bit like this...

*Jesus had disciples twelve;  
And the Bible tells their names;  
First the fishermen four he calls;  
Peter, Andrew, John, and James.  
Philip and Bartholomew;  
Thomas, Matthew, James the Less;  
Simon too, and Thaddeus;  
Judas was so traitorous!*

So let me introduce you to twelve old friends...

Now, we all know pretty much that Judas is not a particularly popular baby name. The name Jude is popular, and I think we can thank Jude Law for that. And back in the late sixties and early seventies the name Jude was popular; and we can thank "Hey Jude" for that.

But the name Judas hasn't been considered a favorite name for little boys for about...well...2000 years; and we all know why. But 2000 years ago, it was a popular name. In fact, two of Jesus' disciples were named Judas. Kind of a bummer if you're the good Judas. So to distinguish the good Judas from the bad Judas, what the gospel writers did is give the good Judas an additional appellation. He is Judas son of James...the last man on this list we just heard from Acts.

Now there are a few disciples who are known by more than one name. This Judas son of James is one of them. Luke and John call him Judas. Matthew and Mark call him Thaddeus. And this Judas—maybe called Thaddeus—says one thing in the entire New Testament. In John chapter fourteen, he asks Jesus a question. And about Judas son of James—one of the Twelve Disciples; one of the Big Twelve; who might have been called Thaddeus—that's all that scripture says.

But at least this Judas seems to have said something. Most of the other twelve say absolutely nothing. James, son of Alphaeus—who because he may have been the youngest of the disciples or the shortest of the disciples was also given the name James the Less—he says nothing in scripture. Bartholomew...he doesn't say anything. Simon the Zealot...he doesn't say anything, either.

**Matthew—who was a tax-collector and who also goes by the name Levi, plays only a small role in the story, also...until, of course, he writes his own version of the story.**

**Philip asked good questions, but he is not the same Philip as the noble and energetic evangelist who appears later in Acts. That's a different Philip.**

**And Thomas...well, he's the bit of grace towards all of us who have ever wondered whether all these claims could ever really be true. Like the rest of us, Thomas is a complex character. Early in the Gospel of John he is willing to go to Jerusalem to die with Jesus. Later, because of a broken heart or because he just can't make sense of it or because there needs to be a Thomas in the story because we are all sometimes like him...we learn that he doubts; and he becomes the patron saint for all of us who, at least once in our life, have one foot in and one foot out because that's the best we can do...**

**John and James...they're two brothers. Not only are they brothers; Jesus gave them a nickname: "Sons of Thunder" he called them, which leads me to believe they may have had a bit of a temper problem; that maybe these two men never really got over being brothers, and as adults continued to be towards one another the way brothers can be towards one another when they are children. John, of course, would one day write a Gospel and letters, and be known as the evangelist of love. James was eventually killed by Herod, and is the only one of the twelve whose martyrdom is recorded in scripture. They would be heroic in their own ways. Of course, none of that has happened yet. At this point...in a room in Jerusalem, praying...they really haven't done much of anything at all.**

**Andrew is the brother of Peter, probably the younger of the two. And sometimes, that must have been tough. More than once, when Jesus brought Peter along with him he also brought James and John, but left Andrew behind. Andrew gets left behind a lot. He is one of those characters who come across differently in the different gospels. In John, he is a connector. He introduces people—including his own brother—to Jesus. But in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and in Acts he gets left behind a lot, and never says a single word.**

**And there is Peter...the Rock. His real name is Simon, but the nickname Jesus gives him is Rocky. He's a large character. He loves Jesus so much, and so much wants to be faithful. He jumps in; he steps forward...he gives walking on water a try; he vows to stay awake with Jesus in Gethsemane, and pledges to go with him to the cross. In his own heart, he is deeply committed. At the same time, when he tries to walk on water he sinks because of his fear. When he vows to stay awake he falls asleep. When he promises to go to the cross he denies Jesus three times. You can't help but love Peter, because he is so much like us...earnest, willing, enthusiastic, impetuous; and at the same time, so weak and frail.**

**Acts mentions by name the eleven men in that room in Jerusalem; and gives the name of one woman. If there is anyone who carries a noble track record into that room, it's Mary the mother of Jesus. She has seen it all, and forgotten more about the Lord than these eleven will ever remember. When she was younger than all of these jokers, she put herself at risk; gave over her life and body and said "yes" to God so that restoration might come to the world. She**

loved her son; cared for him; was a mother to him. And then she gave him up to his purpose, and said good-bye. And when the time came, she stood at the cross. She is the strongest and noblest of the bunch. But read the Gospel According to Mark and you'll discover that there were times when even she wondered about the mission of her son, as well.

Eleven men and one woman, plus some others whose names aren't mentioned; praying in a room in Jerusalem. Palestinian peasants they are. Not a Ph. D. among them; not a Roman citizen; not a rabbi. That any of them could read and write is surprising. If any of them had had any wealth, they had left it behind when they followed him. A few of them sparkle, or are at least interesting. Most of the rest make the color beige look creative.

Certainly, they have had their moments. A few of them have set themselves apart with the occasionally noble word, and their willingness to become sheep and follow the Master is surely a statement of faith. But to this point, most of them have said nothing, and fewer still have done anything. There isn't a Caesar, a Cicero, or a Cato among them.

And these are the ones Jesus chooses. These are the ones God decides to work through. Jesus smiles at them; hands them the Gospel; ascends into heaven, and leaves the message in their hands. These are the ones he charges to do his work, and be his witnesses. They still don't really understand, and they won't for some time. But where the world sees what's not, God sees what is, and can be, and will be.

You've heard this saying before...and I'm going to say it again because it is a truth worth being reminded of and to which this story is another witness: Jesus does not call the qualified; he qualifies the called. And he most certainly does call.

Many of us have known great successes and enjoyed great opportunities. We are a people more powerful than we give ourselves credit for, and are the people the politicians respond to and whose votes they seek.

Nevertheless, we all got those places inside us where we know the glass isn't quite full; places we fall short; mistakes we're liable to; so we may wonder if we're qualified, and if we qualify.

Like those in the upper room, we are gloriously human human beings.

Yet at the same time, we are just like this list of names we just heard...fully and completely the ones God is asking to do the work, and get the job done. No less than with them does Jesus trust us with the mission to witness to our own Jerusalems, Samarias and Judeas, and our own world.

Jesus came to bring restoration; to bring rightness and salvation...and remember that salvation means healing. The word "salve," that thing we put on a wound so that it will be made well, and "salvation" have the same root. And this is the last Sunday of Easter season. In my Easter morning message some forty-three days ago I said this: that we are a people convicted that God is good, and that the Lord has created us for the purpose of helping the world be restored according to God's kingdom vision of love, reconciliation, mercy, and justice...starting right here with the transformation of Short Pump.

That is still why we exist, and the purpose to which we have been called, wherever we find ourselves...whether we are young or old, strong or feeble; whether our primary field of ministry is at home, or at school, or in the workplace; whether our ministry is something spectacular that people want to learn more about, or whether it is something more hidden...like saying our prayers in a closed room. But regardless, we are the ones Jesus trusts with the mission, the same way he trusted them.

So we say our prayers; get to it; let God qualify us; and see what the Lord makes of the effort. After all, what the Lord made of the witness of those people in that upper room is us.

So if you are with Christ Church for the first time, please know that we're just a bunch of folks...rejoicing in the life we've been given; doing our best to be faithful and walk step-by-step...filled with the conviction that—as an old friend of mine once said—since God makes penicillin out of moldy cheese, he certainly makes something out of us. So we invite you to come along, because the restoration of the world is a big job; and if you've gotten out of bed to be here this morning it means that God is whispering that he'd like your help, too; and qualified you to give it.

Here's how the story continued...

It is said that Judas son of James preached the gospel in many places, and finally gave everything for God in the city that is now known as Beirut. It is said that James son of Alphaeus was martyred in Jerusalem; that Bartholomew and Thomas were martyred in India; that Philip was martyred in a city called Hierapolis; that Andrew was martyred in Greece. Simon the Zealot also witnessed in the world, and it is said he met his martyrdom by being sawn in half. James son of Zebedee, as I mentioned, is the only one whose death is mentioned in scripture. Peter, it is believed, after a missionary life of preaching the Gospel, was finally given the opportunity to give his all for his Master and was, himself, crucified in Rome.

Of the twelve who are mentioned in this reading, it is said that three lived to ripe ages. Matthew and John, who served their Lord through the written word; and Mary, who continued to treasure all these things in her heart and who, we think, told her story to Luke.

Not for the first time, the Lord took regular stuff and molded it into the right stuff. Not for the last time, either. It is, after all, what God always does.