

We are in the Season of Lent in Christian calendar. The Season of Lent is a journey in which we have been given the opportunity to grow closer to God through Jesus Christ. This year, we are utilizing the Gospel Matthew as a tool for this journey

Last Sunday, through the Beatitudes we have learned how to uncover a vital and energized faith in the community. Today we will see how this faith leads to action as we examine the criteria Jesus used to select his first mission team—the Twelve. I was hoping that we will also talk about the mission field, but due to the limited time we will just look at the criteria of choosing for the mission team without mentioning the mission field.

Sometimes we think that God calls only impressive, competent people into his service. But God is looking for willing people whom God would like to bless and equip for his service.

Moses who was a stutter is a great example of this. Why would God choose someone like him for God's mission to lead God's people out of Egypt? Certainly it is not because of his competencies! But maybe his incompetency and under qualification were exactly what was needed because salvation is not about us.

Do you remember one of the Beatitudes from Matthew 5—“**You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and God's rule.**” (5:3)? Certainly there is more room for God in the life of incompetent and unimpressive people since oftentimes they are at the end of their rope.

How about Jesus' twelve disciples who were selected for God's mission? Let's look at the criteria that Jesus used to make his selection of the Twelve. And, let's think about the criteria we use for choosing people for God's mission.

**Let me start with the criteria Jesus did NOT use:**

1. **Social status.** *Jesus did not use “Social Status” as his criteria in choosing his mission team.* The disciples Jesus chose for mission were very ordinary people. No one in Jesus' disciples held high positions in Jewish society. They were

mostly fishermen. They were considered as *unschooled, ordinary men (Acts 4:13)*.

**Question:** Are we as a church welcome ordinary people with no-higher education for God's mission? How welcoming are you for those who have no social status?

2. **Political views.** *Jesus did not use "Political views" as his criteria in choosing his mission team.* Simon the Zealot was an extreme nationalist who supported almost any action taken to discomfit the Romans. Today he would be called a freedom fighter or terrorist. Matthew, on the other hand, was a pragmatist—happy to co-operate with the Romans in the matter of collecting taxes.

**Question:** Do we make peace with people who have a different political viewpoint for God's mission? How do you interact with those who have a different political viewpoint if you interact with them?

3. **Personalities.** *Jesus did not use "Personalities" as his criteria in choosing his mission team.* Jesus' disciples had very different personalities. Peter was impulsive, passionate but innately conservative. James and John, called by Jesus, 'The Sons of Thunder,' were boisterous, fervent but thoughtful. Thomas had a gloomy, pessimistic, intense disposition. Matthew was gregarious and methodical; Philip rather hesitant and lacking confidence; Andrew positive and enterprising.

**Question:** Is there room for all sorts of personalities in the life of our church for God's mission? How do you build your relationship with those whose personality is so different from you?

4. **Characters.** *Jesus did not use "Characters" as his criteria in choosing his mission team.* Jesus did not choose people of perfect character to be his disciples because, sadly, none existed. Every one of the Twelve had flaws. Peter longed to be well thought of. James and John were intolerant and selfishly ambitious. Judas was devious, secretive, blinkered and materialistic. Thomas could be self-centered and resentful.

**Question:** Do we expect people, including pastors, to be perfect in order to be welcomed here? How do you react or respond when you see people with the characters you do not prefer or do not care?

5. **Aptitude and abilities.** Jesus did not use “Aptitude and abilities” as his criteria in choosing his mission team. The disciples were slow learners. They did not understand Jesus’ parables or his veiled sayings. Whenever Jesus referred to his death and resurrection the disciples were completely clueless.

Some of the disciples had more ability than others. The ability of Peter, John and Matthew is very obvious; but of the others we read little or nothing in the Gospels or in the book of Acts. We do not know what contribution James son of Alphaeus or Judas son of James made to the early church. They are anonymous.

**Question:** For God’s mission, do we only welcome those who have already proved their ability to think and act alike us and be impressive? How do you work with those who have less capability and welcome them in your life?

6. **Spiritual maturity.** Jesus did not use “Spiritual maturity” as his criteria in choosing his mission team. The Twelve were not spiritually mature. They lacked understanding, they lacked humility and they lacked faith. The disciples were always getting into trouble—missing the point of Jesus’ teaching, lashing out at people who were different, and saying and wanting the wrong things. Their spiritual maturities were so different from each other. Yet Jesus chose and used them all.

**Question:** How do we welcome those who practice their spirituality differently from ours or not meeting our expected level of spiritual maturity?

Lots of thinking time, uh? Let me offer more questions by **looking at the criteria actually Jesus USED:**

1. **Teachable.** As we mentioned earlier, none of Jesus’ disciples was highly educated. None of them belonged to a religious party like the Pharisees. So they did not come to Jesus with too much intellectual and religious baggage. They were open to new ideas.

Several of them had been disciples of John the Baptist. John describes in his gospel their reaction when Jesus introduces himself to them. They were longing for the Messiah to bring spiritual renewal (John 1:35-51). They were so eager to learn.

When I finished my seminary training and became an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church, I thought I knew everything about ministry. However, 17 years later now, I admit that I have so many things to learn about ministry. I am learning every day. How about you?

**Question:** How teachable are you? Are you learning something every day?

2. **Belief.** All the disciples, including Judas, believed Jesus was the Messiah who would establish God's kingdom. Unfortunately they had closed minds about the nature of the kingdom and this in the end was the undoing of Judas. Judas doubted about Christ's intention, but still he believed that Jesus was the Messiah (John 6:60-71). The people Jesus chose to be his disciples were committed to him.

**Question:** How committed are you to God and God's church?

3. **Personal love and devotion.** I am sure that the Twelve Jesus chose admired him and loved him. They enjoyed being with him. Their distress at his crucifixion and joy at his resurrection is a measure of their devotion.

In the end what distinguished eleven disciples from Judas was that their love for Jesus exceeded their devotion to the cause. Judas may have loved Jesus. He did after all betray him with a kiss! But at the end his commitment to Jewish nationalism was greater than his love for Jesus.

**Question:** Do you love God more than your personal agenda or desire? How willing are you to let go of your preference for God's mission and stay in love with God?

God's mission is not about us. It is about God. It is not our work. It is God's work. God's mission is not about "places" but "people."

We all are invited to God's mission regardless how we think of ourselves or others because we all are recipients of God's grace and we all need the Lord. Let us put our faith in action by following the lead of the Holy Spirit and be generous in demonstrating God's grace today and every day. We are on a mission. Amen.