

## More Than a List

*Mark 3:13-19*

Rev. Dan Schumacher

I hope you won't feel guilty if your heart was not all aflutter during the reading of the text...

It's a list... a list of names. Some of the names stand out to us. Some we might not be able to pick out of a line up.

A list of twelve names – twelve people that we have come to call the disciples or the apostles or, simply, the Twelve; twelve people that we have come to think of as Jesus' closest friends, his earliest and most faithful followers; twelve people on whom the Christian Church has been built.

It sounds like Jesus is calling roll – but if we were to close our Bibles, could we even recall the names of his first graduating class?

Years ago now, Fred Craddock told the story of a time when he was summoned by the superior court of Dekalb County, Georgia to serve on the jury. He said:

“On Monday morning, nine o'clock, two-hundred and forty of us formed the pool out of which the juries for civil and criminal cases would be chosen. The deputy clerk of the superior court stood and called the role. Two-hundred and forty names. She did not have them in alphabetical order. You had to listen. And while I was listening, I began to list them.

There were two Bill Johnsons. One was black and one was white, and they were both Bill Johnson.

There was man named Clark – a Mr. Clark, who answered when the clerk read, 'Mrs. Clark.'

He said, 'Here.' And she looked up and said, 'Mrs. Clark.' And he said, 'Here.' And she said, 'Mrs. Clark.' And he stood up and said, 'Well, I thought the letter was for me and I opened it.'

She said, 'We summoned Mrs. Clark.' And he said, 'Well, I'm here. Can't I do it? She doesn't have any interest in this sort of thing.' And the clerk said, 'Mr. Clark, how do you know? She doesn't even know she's been summoned.'

There was another man there whose name I wrote down phonetically, because I couldn't spell it. His name was Zerfeld Lischenstein – Zerfeld Lischenstein. I remember it because they went over it five or six times, mispronouncing it. He insisted

it be pronounced correctly, and finally stood in a huff and said, 'I see no reason why I should serve on a jury in a court that can't pronounce my name.'

The woman next to me said, 'Lischenstein... I wonder if he's a Jew.'

I said, 'Well, I don't know. Could be. Does it matter?'

And she said, 'I am German. My name is Müller.'

And I said, 'Well, it doesn't matter. That was [more than] forty years ago.'

And she said, 'He and I could be seated next to each other in a jury.'

I said, 'Well you were probably just a child when all of that happened years ago.'

She said, 'I was ten years old. I visited grandmother. She lived about four miles from Buchenwald. I smelled the odor'" (Fred Craddock, "When the Roll is Called Down Here").

It's just a list of names, but maybe it's more than that. Maybe there are stories that need to be attached to those names. Maybe there are personalities that need to be examined and understood. Maybe their lives can speak to us, if we will listen.

There are Simon and Andrew, who we know are brothers, but who aren't listed together for some reason. The other brothers, James and John, are listed together. But Simon is the very first name listed, and Andrew is on down the list. We know they were called by Jesus together (Mk 1:16), but they aren't listed together – which seems strange. Why aren't they listed together?

Speaking of James and John: here Jesus nicknames them, Boanerges, which Mark says means "sons of thunder," but neither Hebrew nor Aramaic have any word like that, so it's actually a mystery what Boanerges means, even if their personalities do lend themselves to being called "sons of thunder."

You have Philip, which was a popular Greek name that means "lover of horses," and you have Bartholomew, which is from the Aramaic, *bar Tolmai* – which simply means "son of Tolmai." Thomas is another Greek name, while Matthew is a traditionally Jewish name. All of these Greek names right next to traditional Jewish names on the same list – could we see in this list of names an intentional decision by Jesus to call disciples from *all* walks of life? Could it be that Jesus expects us to model his example and have members in our churches from *all* walks of life?

And there's maybe the most famous (or infamous) apostle of all: Judas Iscariot. Even people who have never darkened the door of a church or cracked the cover of a Bible know who Judas is... know what Judas did. He's the one who sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and sealed his betrayal with a kiss. I think anybody who has ever been a

victim of adultery knows better than most how painful it is to have their betrayal sealed with a kiss.

Is it just a list of names?

That's sort of like saying that our First Baptist Church Family Directory is just a list of names.

There is a drawer in my desk in which I keep the cards that I have received from you church members over the years. In that drawer is a card "from" Brody — who was Ed and Dorothy Abbott's beloved golden retriever. Brody "wrote" a card to Elli Mae, mine and Christen's first Weimaraner, to welcome her to the First Baptist family. Neither Brody nor Elli are still with us... but I still have that card.

There's a hand-written letter from Faye Husted, who, because of her failing vision, struggles to write. I imagine she relates well with Paul who once said, "See how big these letters are... this is how you know it's *me* writing." Faye's letter is several pages in length and tells the story of when her brother snuck his toy firetruck into the manger with Baby Jesus one Christmas when they were kids. It's a story that I'm sure I'll work into my Christmas Eve sermon at some point.

In that drawer is a photo of David Goodale, who I never had the pleasure of meeting even though he would be my age had that tumor not taken him from us. I'll never forget the story Tracy told at his funeral about David loving tinsel on the Christmas tree — so much so that he'd literally just cover the entire tree in clumps of silver tinsel. Tracy and Max sometimes tell me stories about David, and sometimes we cry together.

There is a better-than-good chance that if you have ever sent me a letter or a note or a card of any kind that you are in that drawer, too. It's just a pile of cards, just a list of names — but it's so much more than that, too.

You see, it isn't just a list of twelve names. They aren't just names. They were people... people whom Jesus called to be part of what he was trying to accomplish on this earth. But it wasn't just for their benefit or for, that matter, our benefit. Jesus called them for *his* benefit, too. Read it again, but this time pay careful attention:

"He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, *to be with him...*"  
(Mark 3:13-14).

How many times have I read these verses and never caught those four little words — *to be with him*?

That's how all discipleship happens, isn't it? It happens by *being with him*.

These twelve are trusted by us because they were *with* him. They ate with him, walked with him, were taught by him. They were with him on stormy seas and on the mount where he gave that sermon. They were with him when he healed those lepers and raised the paralyzed man to his feet. They were with him when we rode that donkey down into Jerusalem and they were with him in that upper room. The assumption – and, I think, correctly so – is that their discipleship was the direct result of their being *with him*.

But, before this week, it had never once occurred to me that Jesus may have called them *to be with him* for his sake, too.

How do you leave your family – your brothers, your sisters, your mother – and strike out on a mission to save the world?

How do you meet so much need – feeding the hungry, facing down demons, healing the sick?

How do you confront the injustices of your own faith – squaring off against Pharisees, overturning the tables of the money changers, calling out hypocrisy?

How do you walk the long, lonely road to the cross by yourself?

You don't... not by yourself, any way. If you know your way will be hard and that it will take a toll on you and test your fortitude, then you surround yourself with a trusted group of others who believe in you and believe in your mission, even if they don't fully understand it.

We might call those people friends.

There is something about a good friend that gives us the strength we need to press on, even when life is pressing back against us. Helen Keller said it like this: "I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light."

I don't know how I missed it. All these years of reading the Bible, of attending Sunday School, of going to church, and it never once occurred to me that Jesus needed friends, too – people with whom he could share the burden of his ministry, people he could ask to pray for him, people he could confide in, people with whom he could share the simple joys of life.

He needed friends whom he could count on for encouragement, especially as the journey grew dark.

A longtime friend and mentor of mine, a minister named Arlano, used to tell me stories about his adventures with his grandson, Brent. When Brent was still just a little guy, maybe 3 or 4 years old, every Thursday afternoon he and Arlano would go on an adventure together.

Arlano would drive to his house to pick him up, so that they could go get ice cream, or go to the park, or go to “Joe’s Crab Shack,” which was Brent’s favorite restaurant. I would have suspected McDonald’s for a four-year old, but no — it was “Joe’s Crab Shack.”

But no matter the adventure, their day together always started the same. As soon as grandpa got there, Brent would run next door to pet Daisy, the neighbor’s enormous great dane.

He would run out the front door of his house, screen door slamming behind him. He would run down the sidewalk, and to the neighbor’s chain link fence, and all 100+ pounds of Daisy would come loping up to the fence to meet him.

And, without fail, Brent would see the enormous dog sprinting towards him, barking with excitement — and fear would take hold of him. He would freeze — just be paralyzed by fear. Arlano said, “It didn’t seem to matter that we had done this every Thursday for the past several months — Brent would get to the fence, see the size of the dog in front of him and he would freeze.”

So Arlano would make his way down to the side walk to the chainlink fence in front of the neighbor’s house. He would squat down and he would pick Brent up. And, he said, that without fail, as soon as he picked Brent up, something amazing would happen — a transformation you’d have to see to believe. All fear left the child once he was in his granddaddy’s arms and he’d reach over the fence to rub Daisy’s enormous ears, giggling and laughing the whole while.

Friends can have a way of doing the same thing for us. Just by their presence in our lives — just by their being *with us* — we can be given untold reserves of courage and endurance and clarity and joy.

And surely these twelve did that for Jesus — even with all of their faults, all of their weaknesses, and all of their inadequacies. They didn’t have to be perfect to provide the encouragement Jesus needed. They just needed *to be with him*.

It’s not just a list. Let’s not call it that — because it is so much more than a list.

Amen.