

# Jesus Calls 12 to be With Him

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Mark 3:13-19

**Sermon Series:**  
**Calling People to**  
**Faith**

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My daughter, Emily, lives in Philadelphia. She stopped for coffee at a WAWA convenience store recently. In the twilight of early evening, she spotted a black cat crossing the street, walking straight toward her. Another young woman, whom she didn't know, saw the approaching black cat, also. This cat, actually a six-week-old kitten, was scrawny and hungry, barely the size of Emily's sneaker. My daughter and this young woman found a cardboard box for their new feline friend. The other woman was dressed up and in an obvious hurry to go somewhere. She somehow finagled my daughter into promising to care for the cat and then vanished. My daughter is now the proud owner of a black kitten named Jasper. I'm happy to report that I saw Jasper Thursday, and he is adjusting well to his plush, new habitat!

Some people would wonder about the propriety of taking in a black cat. Black cats are considered bad luck. For the record, the superstition of taking in an orphaned black kitten didn't even register to my animal-loving daughter.

There are plenty of superstitions out there in circulation. It is considered bad luck to open an umbrella indoors or to break a

mirror or walk under a ladder.

Some of you who don't claim to be superstitious, do you ever knock on wood or say "God bless you" when someone sneezes?

Thirteen is considered by many to be an unlucky number. The fear of the number 13 is called triskaidakaphobia. In Formula One auto racing, no cars display the number 13. Some tall buildings have no 13th floor. There are no terminal 13s in any airport in Scotland; there are 12B terminals instead. Some streets lack 13 as a house number.

We're not sure where the unlucky number 13 superstition originated. Many people believe it can be traced to the Last Supper. There was a total of 13 at the table, Jesus and his 12 disciples. Jesus announced, "One of you will betray me." When Judas excused himself, then there were 12.

Friday the 13th is regarded as unlucky, given its association with 13 as well as the day of the week when Jesus was crucified.

Thirteen has the unfortunate position of following 12, a number considered by many as sacred. "Jesus appointed twelve whom he called apostles." Why 12? The symbolism of 12 would be obvious to any first century Jew. The great patriarch Jacob had 12 sons. His 12 sons all married and had children. These 12 families consolidated into a nation of 12 tribes called Israel.

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These 12 disciples went everywhere with Jesus. They ate with Jesus, slept with Jesus; in short, they did everything with Jesus. They became so well-identified with Jesus that Mark referred to them in his gospel as simply “the twelve.”

They were called apostles. We don’t use this designation much anymore, although the Catholic Church teaches the doctrine of Apostolic Succession. This doctrine identifies an unbroken line of succession from today’s bishops all the way back to these original twelve apostles. The Apostle Peter is thereby considered the first bishop of the Catholic Church.

The Church of Latter-Day Saints also claims direct descent from the 12 apostles. That Jesus appeared after his resurrection to believers in America, giving the keys of his kingdom to its president, Joseph Smith, and the chief governing body of the Mormon Church, called the Quorum of the 12.

Protestant churches, like this one, don’t believe the office of apostle exists today. There are no capital “A” Apostles anymore, since the biblical requirement for an apostle is being an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry.

The names of the original 12 apostles are listed in verses 16-19. You will notice there are no women on the list. I can assure you, Jesus would never have lasted even three years if his traveling entourage had included women.

There are four lists of these apostles in the New Testament,

three in the gospels and one in the book of Acts. In all four lists, Peter’s name appears first and Judas’s name is listed last.

The first three names on the list, Peter, James and John, comprise Jesus’ core inner circle. They are all given surnames by Jesus. Simon is given the name Peter and James and John are called by the Aramaic name Boanerges, meaning “Sons of Thunder.”

There are at least two sets of brothers on the list: Peter and Andrew as well as James and John, who, incidentally, are also Jesus’ cousins. If Matthew and Levi are the same people as most scholars believe (see Mark 2:14), then we have three sets of brothers among the 12.

The occupations of the first four are identified as fishing. Matthew, whose name appears 7th on the list, is employed as a tax collector. The occupations of the other seven are unknown to us. Matthew, as a tax collector, would have been in collusion with the Roman government. Simon the Cananaean, whose name appears 11th on the list, was likely a member of a revolutionary political party called the Zealots, since Cananaean is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning zealot. This would mean one of the 12 is working for Rome while another is trying to overthrow it.

Two of them possess Greek names, Philip and Andrew, while three have been given Semitic names, Matthew and Simon. When the topic of Jewish-Roman relations surfaced, I suspect their discussion could get a little dicey.

***The very ordinariness of these disciples ought to give us hope.***

Several of them, James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus, are never mentioned in the Bible beyond this apostolic list.

These 12 possess no special skills to qualify them for Jesus' ministry. The only qualifying characteristic is that Jesus calls them.

These 12 apostles don't initially develop into a promising group of disciples. Simon, whom Jesus calls Peter, meaning the Rock, repeatedly displays his unreliable nature. The so-called Sons of Thunder have ambitions of power that caused considerable bickering among the other apostles. And, of course, one utterly betrays him.

Let me return to something I said last week. The very ordinariness of these disciples ought to give us hope. Jesus didn't surround himself with religious superstars. He kept company with ordinary people, who sometimes behaved like churlish schoolchildren.

In the book *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield argues with a Quaker named Arthur Childs about Jesus' disciples. Childs scolded Holden for criticizing the disciples. He insisted that the disciples must be a good group because Jesus picked them. Holden argued that Jesus picked them, not because they were good guys. The 12, he said, were always letting Jesus down.

What transformed these 12 from reluctant followers into people willing to put their lives on the line for Jesus? Early church tradition has it that all of them, save Judas, died a martyr's death.

Ultimately, it is Jesus' death and resurrection that transforms them, but what sets the stage is verse 14, "He appointed 12...to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim his message."

"He appointed 12...to be with him." These 12 are called disciples or learners. As Jesus' disciples, they had to learn before they could be sent out to teach and preach. They became, in effect, Jesus' apprentices.

There is one essential condition of being someone's apprentice. You must be with that person. You can learn a lot about someone by being with a person. To be an apprentice of Jesus' means, in the first place, to be with him.

Stan Ott has described this apprenticeship in his book as Jesus' "with-me principle." Jesus engages in ministry to people with people. He pours himself into 12 rather ordinary people, who become his church. By the time of the book of Acts, the number of Jesus' followers swells to 120 people in the upper room. After Peter finishes his inaugural sermon, the church of Jesus Christ has expanded to 3000. Today, his church numbers 2.1 billion followers.

Jesus' early disciples had a distinct advantage over us: They saw Jesus in the flesh. But didn't Jesus say, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't go away, the one called alongside to help will not come to you" (John 16:7). Jesus was once limited to a human body, but now he can be everywhere at once through his Spirit.

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I learned how to follow Jesus by studying his teachings and praying to him. I also learned how to follow Jesus by spending time with other people who are farther along as his apprentices.

I am grateful for men in my life, women as well, who have taught me how to live this life of faith. God led spiritual mentors into my life such as Bob Long and Jim Welch, Gordon Fee and David Scholer, and Dick Hutcheson. I urge you to identify someone in your life who is out ahead of you, as well as someone behind you, who can help you in the things of God.

“He called 12...to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim his message.” These 12 are both with him as his disciples as well as sent out as his apostles. The Greek word for apostle literally means “the sent out ones.”

We are with Jesus, then we are sent out. Being with Jesus will invariably result in doing things for Jesus.

We are people on a mission to proclaim Jesus' message. Our message, let's be clear, is not to become dead-eye critics of everyone else's behavior. Our message is offering people real life. Jesus offers abundant life to people. We've got to get this message out, folks; most people think Jesus wants to subtract from peoples' lives rather than substantially add to them.

Our focus, this fall, is God's call. There is God's call, big C, and God's call, little c. God's call, big C, is an invitation to enter into

relationship with God through Jesus Christ. God's call, little c, is to join God in doing His work.

Our church's mission, as we have said several times, is Call-Equip-Send. Our mission is to call people to faith, to equip people for ministry and to send them forth to love and serve the world. The principle of Call-Equip-Send is contained within this 14th verse. “He appointed 12”—that's call. “He appointed 12...to be with him”—that's equip. “He appointed 12...to be sent out to proclaim his message”—that's send.

The church of Jesus is not a holy huddle, a little enclave against the monstrous evils of the world. We are called to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim his message.

