

### **Sermon Pentecost 3, Proper 6 Year A 2023; Gospel Matthew 9:35-10:8**

*God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit: Open us to know your Presence. Amen.*

Ok, good people of All Saints', we are going to start today with a little quiz. In case you haven't noticed yet, I like teaching about scripture and theology and prayer and just about all things related. Here is your question: How many of you can name the twelve disciples of Jesus? We just heard them, but I would venture to guess that not many of you can name them all. Further, I will admit that I can't usually come up with them either! So here they are: Simon also known as Peter, his brother Andrew, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (called by some James "the less", or "Little James"), Thaddeus, Simon known as Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot. There you have it! There are a couple of problems, though, and these add to the difficulty of remembering them all. First, some go by more than one name, depending on which gospel you're reading. For instance Bartholomew is also Nathaniel, and Thaddeus also goes by Lebbaeus, and also by Judas son of James. And in addition the lists cited in the synoptic gospels are not identical. So, scripture doesn't make it easy. For the interested among you, there is a mnemonic I found to help. It's not perfect, but with a little practice you can get it. It's PBJSTAMP, like "peanut butter jelly STAMP." But remember that there are 5 Js. So here it is: Peter, Bartholomew, John, James, James, Judas, Judas (remember also known as Thaddeus and Jude), Simon, Thomas, Andrew, Matthew, and Philip. There you have it: PBJSTAMP!

Enough for our lesson in scripture. Those twelve are all part of our gospel today. Jesus calls them together for what is called his Mission discourse, one of five discourses in Matthew's gospel, specifically to give them authority over what he calls "unclean spirits," to cure every disease and every sickness, and further "to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." It's really all about healing. I want to talk about Jesus today, specifically the historical Jesus, that is the Galilean Jew named Jesus who lived two thousand

years ago in 1st century Palestine, and who was executed by the Romans. Marcus Borg refers to this Jesus as the “Pre-Easter” Jesus, the man about whom we actually don’t know much. He contrasts this historical Jesus with the “Post-Easter” Jesus, which is the Jesus of Christian tradition and experience, what he also calls the Christ of faith. It took the church and theologians almost four centuries—think about that: four centuries with numerous councils filled with controversies about what was heretical thinking and what was to become accepted as orthodoxy—to finally decide exactly who and what Jesus is, that being both fully human and fully divine, one of the three persons of the Trinity, God as one being in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As I understand it now, it does make sense. There is truth in both the historical Pre-Easter Jesus and the resurrected Jesus, in both the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. This is what Christians have experienced and worshiped throughout the centuries. Indeed it is where we find our faith. Jesus himself said he was leaving us with what he called the Advocate, and what we now call the Holy Spirit. It is the Presence of God in every person and in every created thing. It is the World of Spirit. It is not something “out there” somewhere, something supernatural, something remote that maybe some day we will get to experience. Rather, it is God the sacred right here at the center of our existence, the holy mystery that is all around us and in us. It is the ground beneath and the life within everything we see and know. St. Paul put it well when he said it is where “we live and move and have our being.” As the prophet Isaiah put it, “God of power and might; heaven and earth are full of your glory.” And Jesus knew it and lived it. The Son of the Trinity, the Christ Jesus, was and is in all of it now.

But I digress, because what I want to talk about today is Jesus the human man who lived those two millennia ago. I think it’s important to remember that Jesus of Nazareth was human, just like you and me. It’s not as if he was God pretending to be human. What he did was to show us what the perfect life of a human being in God looks like. He knew no sin, and if we define sin as anything

that separates us from God, then Jesus was always in union with God. So what he did was to show us what that kind of life looks like. Of all the things we can say about this historical Jesus, these three things are certain: He was a spirit-filled man. He was a healer. He was a compassionate man. The gospel today is all about healing, and specifically says “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.” Then he sends his twelve disciples—the PBJSTAMP—out to do the same as he has been doing.

What does it mean to be a “spirit-filled” person? I think it means first to have a direct experience of God, and then to live one’s life listening for and acting upon what that Spirit calls one to do. It means living one’s life in God, and Jesus was and is the model for what that looks like. It means staying connected to, in union with God, in intimate relationship with God. Jesus did this in part by prayer. He often went off by himself to pray. I would guess not so much by praying verbally, with words to God, but probably more in solitude and silence just spending time with God, just being present, allowing the Spirit to move through him. As the Psalmist puts it “For God alone my soul in silence waits.” (Psalm 62:1) That to me is what it means to be a Spirit-filled person. Upon leaving those moments alone with God he would return to live his life that way. Jesus said it well when he announced early in his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” (Luke 4:18-19) His entire life was about allowing that Spirit that he knew so well to move through him into the lives of everyone he encountered. And that meant having compassion for and healing those in need. We have seen it throughout Matthew’s gospel: cleansing the leper, healing the Centurion’s servant, Peter’s mother, the demon-possessed Garesenes, the paralyzed man, the dead little daughter of the leader of the synagogue, the woman with twelve years of hemorrhage, the two blind men, the one who was mute. The list goes on and on. Jesus the healer. Jesus heals.

One word that captures the essence of Jesus is compassion. For him compassion is the central quality of God, and the central moral quality of a life centered in God. In Luke's gospel we hear him say "Be compassionate as God is compassionate." (Luke 6:36) Compassion means to "feel with," to feel the feelings and the suffering of somebody in a deep visceral way, at a level deeper than just with our mind. It means feeling that suffering of someone else as if it is your own suffering, and being moved to do something about it. For Jesus compassion was a core value in the life of community, and it was his compassion for those suffering that led him to confront the social and religious systems whose laws about piety and whose purity codes led to that suffering. He eats with the despised tax collectors like Matthew, invoking the wrath of the Pharisees. He touches and is touched by those considered "unclean," like the hemorrhaging woman whose blood would make Jesus himself "unclean" and "untouchable." He touches the dead, that little twelve year-old girl, in violation of the laws in his own scripture Leviticus. Jesus' compassion had no boundaries. It extended to the marginalized and the outcast and the shunned, as well as to the powerful, to not only the despised tax collector Matthew and to the "unclean" women in need, but also to the father of the little girl, himself a leader in the synagogue. No one was—no one is—excluded.

Spirit-filled, compassionate, healer. It is these characteristics of Jesus that he extends to his twelve disciples as they go out on their mission, and that he extends to us in our missions today. Who among us does not need compassion? Who among us has not at some time in our lives needed healing, the kind of healing that only the Christ Jesus provides? And just as Jesus calls his twelve disciples to be compassionate and to heal, he also calls us. Remember that he was human too, just as we are human. He is calling us to be more like him: 1) Compassion for everyone, even and perhaps especially in the face of power systems that not only cause the suffering but also hinder its cure—just like Jesus did when he confronted the powers behind piety and purity

codes of his day. 2) Healing for those in need: Not just physical healing, but healing of our relationships, of the loneliness of those on the margins and separated from community, of our own lives when they turn lifeless, which we all experience at one time or another. He calls us to provide this restorative healing that touches those who need to know that they are never alone, but rather are always a part of this community in Christ. 3) And third, to be spirit-filled people, intimate with God who is with us and in us, listening for that Presence, following where it leads us. We are his disciples now. In fact I'll add another word to our mnemonic: PBJSTAMPMe. Peter, Bartholomew, John, James, James, Judas, Jude, Simon, Thomas, Andrew, Matthew, Philip, and Me—that means you!