

SERMON- Trinity Sunday (B) Baptism

Charles R. Cowherd

Isaiah 6:1-8

Romans 8:12-17

John 3:1-17 — MARK 3.13-19¹

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

May 26, 2024

Psalm 29

OPENING:

“Jesus called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.

And he appointed the 12:”

Simon (Peter);

James and John, sons of Zebedee

Andrew, brother of Simon

Philip & Bartholomew,

Matthew, the Levite

James son of Alphaeus, (Not the other James)

Thomas, the Twin & Thaddaeus, (more about him later)

Simon the Cananaean, AND finally

Judas Iscariot,

They teach you in Seminary to never make yourself look like Jesus but, today, I

“would like to call those whom Charles wanted, and for them to come to me. I

would like to appoint the following 12”

(and invite them forward):

Mark, the Cowherd; Leo the Cousin, and Cristiano the Soccer Player

Savannah, our Acolyte

Connor, brother of Savannah

Annemarie the youngest of the Smith sisters

Keira Lal of the Culpeper Lals

Mariana of the Fairfax Kuchlers

Drew Rachel, sometimes called Andrew

and Samantha, brother of

And August, born in August

Edith, sister of August

NAMES:

The Bible is pretty wrapped up in numbers, in 3s and in 12s, and it's pretty wrapped up on names, changing them and explaining them.

The Book of Numbers: naming pets and toys.

In the Episcopal Church, we don't have the tradition of acquiring a new name. The one you got from your parents is just fine, we believe.

¹ Changed because of Baptism, child named Thaddeus

That line in the Prayer Book “Name this child” is leftover from just the priest needing to know who the child is.

Your name stays the same, your identity changes.

We don't get to choose. Jesus calls us and it seems pretty indiscriminate about our qualifications.

Directory: me calling people, them answering

PP: Phone calls to ask folks to serve on vestry.

Answers: how did you get my name? I am too busy.

I am just buying my house in NC

I am not worthy.

Jesus followed no such protocol to appoint the 12. No evidence that he did an MBTI or weighed the strengths and weaknesses, no sense of “worthiness.”

Striking thing is utter lack of qualifications in 12:

Several are mere fishermen, one is a tax collector, one is a supernationalist, one is a Benedict Arnold/ a quisling. Some they cannot even agree on their names.

Regardless, today we will add two more to that number to try to make it to the perfect 12.

We will baptize Thaddeus, born in Memphis, goes to Fox Mill Elementary School, headed back to Japan where his Air Force parents will serve another tour.

And Alianne, born in Reston, daughter of Aceline and Richardson Hyppolite, former high school sweethearts from Haiti, drawn to our church because of our relationships to that country.

TWELVE:

Today is Trinity Sunday so we are supposed to be all about the number three but instead I am going to concentrate on that number 12.

There is the old line from Youth Ministry days that Jesus had the very first youth group, and he had 12 people following him. And Jesus like every youth minister after him had 11 who didn't listen to him, and one who is trying to kill you.

The Bible loves the number 12.

The twelve tribes of Israel:

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

There are the twelve minor prophets:

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

And then, of course, the twelve disciples that I just named in the Gospels.

All those “Twelves” are why we have 12 sails above us. More about them later.

Today we add to that 12, with two more.
And we are so lucky and blessed.

That having been said, Jesus was not hung up on that “Twelve” as an exclusive group.

The twelve disciples, as we know, were kinda middling to mediocre in terms of their discipleship. This “dirty dozen” could be spectacularly dense. Appointed by our Lord to do this great work, they were so very human.

In other words they looked like the church.

They are eclipsed fairly soon, by the Book of Acts, by a new group, by Paul and James, the brother of Jesus, and Stephen and Phillip and blessed Timothy.

It was never about the number actually, it was about building this new community.

PROMISE + TRAGEDY

It’s interesting that each Gospel also names the Twelve a little bit different.

Notice how Andrew is not named here as Simon’s brother, and elsewhere Thaddeus becomes Jude, and Simon the Canaanite becomes Simon the Zealot. This means that the names were already being lost to history.

But all the lists starts with the “Big 4” (Andrew and Simon Peter, and James and John), and then they end with Judas.

For the sails, I like to put the “Big 4” in the middle here.

And then the anonymous ones, the ones we don’t know anything about them which is most of them, are on each side moving outwards.

Judas then is always at the end of the lists.

I don’t know where to put him in our Sails.

My very first sermon here I talked about these sails and how they were knit lovingly by the wife of one of my predecessors. I gave an assignment to think about saints in your own life and Jill Cox was one of the only ones who responded and she suggested “Mary” to replace Judas.

But there’s a lesson here in this passage and in this list, with that pattern.

Notice, again, how it goes: how it starts with excitement, promise, hope, and the naming of the 12 and the mission before them

But then it ends a few short verses later, tempered by disappointment, tragedy

The list ends with “The one who would betray him.”

This passage, then, is a little bit like childhood, like growing up, a little bit like life ... the cynics might say it’s a little like “reality.” This sense of a noble beginning, and then what comes next.

For better or for worse, our baptismal service has that baked into it, we got the water and the white font and the candle and the beautiful child and we name them and then all of the sudden, you turn from page 5 to 6 and as quickly as you go from the A-Team to Judas, in our service you go from supporting and raising up the baptismal candidates straight to:

“Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness?”

“Do you renounce the evil powers of this world?”

“Do you renounce all sinful desires...?”

That always hits a little hard in a Baptismal Service. (I can feel people flinch, when it's read.)

“Why bring that up?”

“I thought this was supposed to be happy.”

Same thing happens at Weddings, by the way, people want to excise the Prayer Books mention of the reality of marital discord and trouble.

Same thing happens at Funerals, even, people try to avoid mentioning the word “Death”

CONCLUSION/SAILS:

But here we are. That brings us back to the sails.

They are important because they remind us of our direction and our vector.

They model the work of the disciples guiding us to the cross, to Jesus.

They show us the way of our baptized lives,

how to sail the rough and stormy seas,

as well as to soar over the calm and smooth ones.

They come from different places: fishermen, tax collectors, revolutionaries... but they all end up in the same place

We know this to be true from the list of the original 12 disciples, and we behold the “new Israel” there and here in front of us and pray for the same thing for them and for us.

They are what helps us get to God, a community of faith, a collection of individuals, flawed and musty and torn but also strong and beautiful and sweeping. They will be your guide: the sinners and saints from the Bible that make up the 12, and that “great cloud of witnesses.”

You will have your parents, and you will have all of them as your guide.

And you will have god parents, you will have this church, and churches in Japan and in Haiti that will be helping you in that journey to a loving God, 3-in-1, and 1-in 3.

AMEN