

## **2021 05 16 – Being Apostles**

### **Acts 1:12-17, 21-26 (The Inclusive Bible)**

Jesus was gone. His disciples had stood on the Mount of Olives and watched as the Risen Christ ascended into the clouds and disappeared. Today's scripture tells us that Jesus' followers then returned to Jerusalem, to the upstairs room where they were staying. There were other women and men with the disciples, including members of Jesus' family: his mother and his brothers and sisters.

Eleven of the original twelve disciples remained. Judas, the one who had betrayed Jesus, was gone, having died a brutal death. Peter knew that this twelfth spot needed to be filled. The disciples were all Jewish and the number twelve, was important to their people. It was, of course, the number of sons of Jacob, the number of tribes of Israel. The number twelve had a sense of fullness and completion about it. With only eleven disciples, the circle was broken.

So one day Peter got up in front of a crowd of Jesus' followers and said,

one of those who accompanied us all the time that Jesus moved among us, from the baptism of John until the day Jesus was taken up from us, should be named as witness with us to the Resurrection.

So they came up with two names and then using a game of chance, asked God to choose between them. Today's reading ends with the words:

They then drew lots between the two. The choice fell to Matthias, who was added to the eleven apostles.

Wait a minute, what just happened there? I thought Jesus' followers were called disciples. So what is this new word and where did it come from? Why is the writer of Acts suddenly calling the disciples by a different name? What's the difference between a disciple and an apostle?

I'll admit I had to do a little research myself; apostle is not a word that I use very much in my preaching and teaching. So here's what I found out: a disciple is a follower or a student, someone who is learning from a teacher, a rabbi, a guru or master. An apostle, on the other hand, is someone who has been sent, often with a message to be shared.

While Jesus was with them, the twelve were his disciples. They were learning through Jesus' words, his actions—the very life that he was living. Yes, he did send them off on their own once in a while, but they always knew they could come back to their teacher. But now their rabbi was gone. He had died on the cross, had appeared to them as the Risen Christ and even more recently had ascended into the clouds.

In the Gospel of John, when Jesus was praying for his disciples just before his death, he said to his Abba God:

As you have sent me into the world,  
so I have sent them into the world. (John 17:18)

To be sent, is to be an apostle. This is why the book of Acts, is called the Acts of the Apostles. It is all about the ones who Jesus sent into the world to share the good news of the Risen Christ, to share the good news of the Spirit of Love, to share the goods new of God's amazing grace.

So what does that make us? As Christians, as followers of Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are we disciples or are we apostles?

I have to admit that I am quite comfortable with the idea of being a disciple. I like having someone to follow, someone who will guide me, someone who will teach me how to be in this world. For me, Jesus is that teacher. I love reading the gospels and learning more about who Jesus was and what he had to say. I feel like I could keep on learning and growing forever!

But being an apostle is different. An apostle is sent out into the world. An apostle is a messenger. An apostle has to interact with other people in order to share the good news. An apostle may have to deal with people you really don't want to hear their message. That role seems a lot more difficult, at least to me.

But the good news is that it is possible to be both a disciple and an apostle at the same time. It is possible and even preferable to still be listening and learning, to be guided by our teacher, even as we go into the world to share the good news of God's love.

In fact, I believe there are many ways that the disciples in this congregation are already being apostles. I have a few ideas in mind, but I'm going to invite you to name some of the ways that First United Church is spreading the good news in our community and even beyond. Think of some of the activities, the projects, the events that you have led, participated in, or are aware of , where God's love and grace are being shared. Please go ahead and type them in the chat. (*wait for people to type and read what is written*)

Here's some of the messengers and messages that I am aware of:

- Visiting Working Group – phoning and visiting people in hospital, at home and in senior's residences
- Outreach Committee – organizing baking goods and other food items for CMHA
- Book Study Group – read *A Good War* by Seth Klein and were inspired to send copies of his book to local politicians
- Affirming Ministry Committee – writing letters to spread the good news of God's love for everyone , most recently to warn of the dangers of Conversion Therapy
- Refugee Sponsorship Working Group – getting a story in our local paper and thus spreading the news that God's love goes beyond barriers of culture or even religion
- Building & Property – caring for our building even in this time of COVID-19 so that we will be ready to extend hospitality to those in our community who will need a place to gather

- Worship & Music Committee – now planning ways to make get even our in-person worship services online so that the message that is shared each Sunday is available to anyone and everyone no matter where they are

Like the twelve that Jesus sent, we are also called to spread the good news.

Every time we reach out with love to our families, our neighbours here in Swift

Current or our neighbours around the world, we are being apostles.

So may we continue to learn and grow in our faith, may we continue to be guided by the life and the teachings of Jesus and may we continue to be apostles to the world! Amen.