

Our gospel reading started with this.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”

I have been thinking recently about what it must have been like to have been one of Jesus' disciples. Were these 12 men anything special? We are often told that the answer to that question was a most emphatic No. Let's remind ourselves a bit about these 12 men.

Probably the 4 we are told the most about are the sets of brothers Andrew and Peter, and James and John. These four were fishermen – and were probably business owners as they employed others. We know less about Thomas, Bartholomew, and Philip but they may also have worked as fishermen as they were out fishing with the first four when Jesus appeared on the beach after the resurrection.

Matthew, called Levi in Luke's gospel, worked as a tax collector for the Roman Government – so he was probably quite wealthy and his money may have helped to fund Jesus' ministry.

Simon was known as the Zealot – which meant he engaged in the more direct sort of politics seen today in groups like extinction rebellion.

Judas Iscariot was the treasurer of the group – and so perhaps had some sort of financial background but we are told nothing about him before he was a disciple. The other two we know nothing about – there was another James, who was the son of Alphaeus and there was Thaddaeus, whose name is even different in different places – sometimes Jude or Judas Thaddeus.

But the point is these 12 men were nothing out of the ordinary when Jesus called them. They were not priests, for example, so we cannot assume great knowledge of the scriptures – although they were all Jews, and so would have had some knowledge. And of course they didn't apply for the job. They were called by Jesus, and they responded. And throughout the gospels Jesus tries to teach them, and they don't find understanding Jesus easy – and at times Jesus gets slightly exasperated by them, to say the least.

When Jesus returns, as he promised to do, I wonder whether he will work in the same way again. If he asked an existing body to choose him 12 disciples, there are several things which would be very different. For a start I would expect there to be 6 men and 6 women. They would ensure that the balance of their ethnic backgrounds correctly represented the population. Surely issues such as representation of disabled people, of people of varying sexuality, people from different social backgrounds would all need to be taken into account. There would need to be a thorough selection process, an intense vetting process, and then probably the realisation that in order to meet all the criteria of selection Jesus would this time need a much higher number of disciples than 12.

Or perhaps Jesus would just know which 12 people to pick – as he did the first time. They were ordinary people living ordinary lives – and when Jesus called them they served another person. OK so we now know that Jesus was fully human, but was also fully God, and so he was a very special unique person, but don't ever forget that he was a human being, a person, born in the same way that you and I were born, grew up in a normal family learning a normal profession, learning how to love other people, and how to deal with brothers and sisters when they got on his nerves – you can picture it can't you: “Oh Jesus, are you reading the scriptures again, don't be such a wimp and come and play Caves and Gladiators” or whatever the game was.

Jesus and his disciples were people who cared for and loved each other, and everyone else they came into contact with. The disciples were sent out on errands, on missions, and sometimes were successful and sometimes got it wrong, but Jesus trusted them to go and try. And whilst all this mission work was

going on Jesus taught them so that when he was no longer with them they would be able to carry on his work – even if at that stage they didn't understand that he was going to leave them as soon as he did.

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So is this Jesus getting exasperated? Jesus says this at the end of a teaching session in which Jesus tells the disciples that one of them is going to betray him, Jesus tells Peter that he will deny him, Jesus tells them all that the way to God is through himself, Jesus says he will ask his Father to send them the Holy Spirit, and Jesus talks about himself being the True Vine, and that his father removes any branches that do not bear fruit. Now, if I was a disciple and Jesus had just warned me that if I was branch of the True Vine that was not up to the job I would be removed, and then Jesus said,

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should I not be at least a little worried? Is Jesus saying that the disciples are not up to the job? Absolutely not. Verse 13 starts to show us what he means. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." Before we consider that in detail let's go back to the people issue. Jesus was a person. The disciples were people. The Holy Spirit is not just some vague magical thing floating around somewhere, but is a person as well – yes a person that we cannot see, but the only way that the disciples could understand the Spirit of Truth – or the Holy Spirit as we know him, is to treat him as a person. Jesus says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." Now I know some people will immediately say, why does the Holy Spirit have to be a man? And the answer is he doesn't – in the same way that God should never be seen as either male or female, the Holy Spirit likewise should be seen as neither male nor female, but to stress that the Holy Spirit is a person, we cannot refer to the Holy Spirit as it.

But back to what Jesus has just said. Jesus is not giving them anymore teaching at this stage – because they don't need it at this point, and when they do, Jesus will ask God to send the Holy Spirit to tell them what they need to know. The Holy Spirit will be there to make these ordinary people capable of carrying on Jesus' work.

And that is why we have this passage as a gospel reading on Trinity Sunday. It brings the three parts of God together – God the Son, Jesus, will ask God the Father, to send God the Spirit to show the disciples what they need. The three people of God would show his disciples what they need to know.

And nothing, nothing, has changed about the Holy Spirit since then.

We are ordinary people trying to be good followers of Jesus Christ. That is not always easy. There are often many things which we don't understand. There are many times when we don't know what to do. There are times when we get things right and there are times when we get things wrong. There are times when we are sent out on errands, on missions, and sometimes we are successful and sometimes we get it wrong, but Jesus trusts us to go and try. And that same Holy Spirit is there to enable us ordinary people to carry on Jesus' work. When those 12 disciples died, Jesus' ministry didn't stop – we are now carrying it on because of the help that the Holy Spirit gives us.

But let's go back to that opening line of the Gospel reading again.

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The 12 disciples were, yes with some difficulty, always learning from Jesus. By the time the Holy Spirit came to help them they had learned a huge amount. So we must follow that example. We must never

be satisfied with however much we know about our Christian faith, and that is why I am forever encouraging people to spend more time with their bibles – because reading the bible, studying the bible so that we understand it, is the closest we can come to Jesus teaching those 12 disciples, those 12 ordinary people who when Jesus called them were just as ordinary as we are today.

I love reading books about modern day disciple's attempts to follow what God is calling them to do; stories of people who felt called by God, through the Holy Spirit to do something different with their lives. That doesn't mean to say that we are all called to do something different which is going to turn our lives upside down, so please don't leave this place today thinking I'm suggesting that – but by hearing the major changes that the Holy Spirit called some people to make in their lives can inspire us to make the small changes that can also make a significant impact on our, or other people's lives.

Sometimes it is the big stories that inspire us. There's the story of Alan Mortlock, whose life was in a mess following a period in prison after a violent fight, and whose life was being wrecked further by alcohol and drugs. And how a friend of his called Steve, himself an ex-drug smuggler who had found Jesus, felt called to respond when he got a call for help from Alan's wife and visit Alan and tell him that he needed Jesus in his life. There is the story of Angus Buchan, a South African farmer, whose farm was facing ruin due to a drought, and felt called by the Holy Spirit to still plant his potato crop despite everything he knew about farming telling him it was a waste of time, and he ended up with a record crop – a story he was then able to use on many mission talks. Or the story of Richard Coles – the transition from keyboard player of the Communards and the behaviour surrounding that to becoming Vicar of Finedon in Northamptonshire via a visit to the shop in York Minster when, to use his words after unexpectedly finding himself buying a silver cross he, "went in a tourist and came out a participant".

This is the Holy Spirit at work. And I know that the Holy Spirit is always there to help me when I get stuck. When I got to Wednesday this week and had no idea how to put a sermon together for today, it was God, through the Holy Spirit that said to me, focus on ordinary people. And I know it was the Holy Spirit at work when a vicar friend of mine, through no fault of her own was running late for a meeting and found a full car park when she arrived at her destination responded to her prayer by mysteriously providing an empty space. The Holy Spirit can do amazingly large things, and what can also seem like quite trivial thing to help us, God's ordinary people, to carry on his son Jesus' work.

But please remember this. We are people. We are fallible. We make mistakes. But when we get stuck, don't panic. We just need to call on the Holy Spirit. We don't need to know all the answers before we start on something new.

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But when we need to, and we can bear them, the Holy Spirit will fill the gaps.

Amen