

So up until now we have seen Jesus become a popular preacher, teacher and healer attracting large crowds as his fame spread. And at this point, there are two groups of people around him: there is the crowds who came to receive healing and hear Jesus speak and his disciples who trailed after him wherever he went learning his ways as his students. So this movement is growing rapidly and Jesus isn't just thinking about now but he's also thinking about the future and sees the need to choose leaders who can be entrusted with his gospel and be responsible for preaching it to the world. So we pick up in Luke 6 verse 12 this morning...

*In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. 13 And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: 14 Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, 15 and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

Lets pray

So it's no wonder that we read in verse 12, 'In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.' Jesus was about to choose the men who would carry on what He had begun, who would see his work extend. So Jesus gave this an entire night of prayer. In a sense, there was nothing in Jesus' three years of ministry before the cross more important than choosing these men. So this brings us to our first point this morning:

### **Jesus prioritized prayer**

This is not the first time Luke has given us insight into Jesus' prayer life. It seems to be one of Luke's themes throughout his gospel. Luke has already told us that Jesus would 'withdraw to desolate places and pray' and that's exactly what he is doing again here. This time it was an all night prayer session because the next day he was going to make some extremely important decisions.

So what is there in this for us? I don't know about you but so often for me prayer is my last resort rather than the thing I do first. Martin and I joke about it, but when we're really struggling to write a sermon or prepare a study and we're having a blockage (which is not uncommon!), we'll say, "it looks like I'm gonna have to actually resort to prayer if I carry on like this!" But the truth is we try to do so much without praying. Why is that? We have unlimited access to all the power and wisdom of a God who knows everything; past, present and future but hurry, and busyness dominate our society and dominate our lives. It seems like there's never any time for solitude. Instead we turn to technology! If you're anything like me you want instant answers and feedback so you would rather use Google, or ask friends what they think. How often do we actually shut ourselves off from media, computers, and other voices and grab a pen, some paper and our bible and just go out to a quiet place and seek God? Honestly, I know it's not easy but it's so crucial if we want to hear the voice of God, and especially when we have big decisions to make.

The Psalms encourage us to be still in the presence of God so that we can hear his voice. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God." It may be that God is choosing not to shout above our noisy lives! So rather than make prayer our last resort let's find a quiet place and even if it is not for long; start with prayer. All our decisions need to be bathed in prayer. Most people pray after they've made their decision: usually, or in my case, asking God to fix it! Thankfully God is gracious and it's not wrong to consult others but consult God first. In the words of the old hymn, *What a friend we have in Jesus, 'Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!'* Let's not neglect this wonderful privilege of taking everything to God in prayer.

And so Jesus comes down from the mountain where he has been praying all night and proceeds to call 12 men from his group of disciples who he can entrust as apostles to lead the movement; to be his ambassadors, taking the gospel to the entire world. And what a motley crew they are!

### **Jesus calls a motley crew!**

According to Acts 17:6, these 12 guys that Jesus is about to choose went on to turn the world upside down and yet what a motley crew Jesus chooses! A really unlikely combination of men! On this team is Simon the zealot who hates the rule of the Roman government over God's people and wants them overthrown. Then there is Matthew the tax collector who works for the Roman government ripping off God's people. I don't know how those two ever got on the same team! We've got a hated tax collector, four fishermen, some are brothers (I have 3 brothers so I know what kind of trouble that can cause!), some are political activists, some are married, some are single, they're from various places and they have all kinds of backgrounds and beliefs. Yet Jesus calls all these guys together and they all have one thing in common: Christ brings them together. They are Jesus oriented. They love Jesus and they want to be used by him. And so we learn that if you're Christ centred you can have a bunch of people who disagree on other stuff but you come together as a community for one purpose and goal; to worship Jesus Christ and take his gospel to the world.

And one church particularly springs to mind while I am speaking: ours! Westlake Church, Lausanne! What motley crew we are! Some of us grew up in church, some didn't, some are from the church of England, some Baptist, some Vineyard, others have Brethren backgrounds. Some of us are Swiss, some are French, some African, we have Germans and Koreans, we have Americans and most importantly we have English...though not enough from the north of England I'm sad to say! Some are old, wise and experienced, some are young like our pastor Martin. Some have a lot of hair some not so much and we all have different beliefs and ideas of how things should be done yet God can fashion us into a unified and purposeful team. That doesn't mean we never disagree but as the bible says in Proverbs 27:17, 'as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another' We all need sharpening and our diversity helps that sharpening process. The apostles needed sharpening! What a privilege to work together for one purpose. This environment we find ourselves in here unique and special. One thing is for sure: diverse teams are strong teams. We even see this in the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: 3 persons that are diverse but not divided. In fact they are perfectly unified. I for one feel extremely blessed to a part of this group of people here at Westlake. Unity is a powerful thing. Let's continue to humble ourselves and put others first as we serve God together and keep

Christ at the centre of all we do and say. The church is all about community. That's what so amazing about Christianity; we don't want to only seek out others to be on our team who are exactly the same as us and agree with us on everything: that would just make for a boring team! Jesus didn't pick out the guys you'd expect to all work together the best. He picked a diverse team!

Now in his unlikely team was one man who would turn out to be a traitor and come to a sad end: Judas Iscariot, which leads us to the question, what was Jesus thinking when he called Judas Iscariot?

### **Doubting God in rocky places**

It's not until later on in the gospel when we see how Judas' true colours that we might be tempted to question Jesus' calling Judas. We naturally wonder 'how could Jesus, after spending all night in prayer to God and being fully in His fathers will, choose a false disciple; a traitor?' Did Jesus make a mistake? Did he perhaps not pray hard enough? Was he out of God's will? He chose a guy who would betray him: did he lack discernment? We cannot for a moment doubt, that in choosing Judas Iscariot, Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. He knew this man would one day betray Him. Then why did he appoint him to be an apostle? This question is one that has confused many, but one thing we can be sure of is that God is never taken by surprise and He is never wrong! He does everything deliberately, and with deep wisdom. In fact God himself explains to us through the prophet Isaiah 'my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' What comfort there is in that for us. That when we make a decision, having prayed a lot about it and trusting God and then it seems to just all go wrong, we can know that God's sovereign hand is over it and just because we encounter difficulty it doesn't mean we're out of God's will. Often people will tell you, or you will even question yourself if God can have called you to something that is just not turning out as you thought it would. After Nicola and I got married we felt God moving us to another part of England to serve in a church, we prayed about it, we sought godly counsel, we were given scriptures and we were certain this was where God wanted us. Well we had a very difficult year there; nothing really turned out like we'd hoped and man did we struggle at times. And it didn't help when people who saw us struggling said 'well it must not be God's will', it absolutely was exactly where God wanted us and we see the fruits of that time now and wouldn't change it for anything even though we didn't quite feel like that at the time! One thing we have to know is that God's will does not always mean plain sailing and when we hit rocks it does not necessarily mean we are in the wrong place.

God always knows what he is doing, even if we don't understand it all! Jesus chose Judas knowing that he would betray him, knowing he would go to the cross and it is at the cross that Jesus opened the door to salvation and forgiveness and freedom from sin that his grace might be offered to all who believe in Him.

### **What can we learn from Judas?**

We have much to learn from the life of Judas. Let it serve as a warning to us this morning. The frightening reality is that Judas was in Jesus' inner circle and yet he let other things consume his worship. You can be a pastor or an elder, you can lead a small group or attend every church service, you can follow Jesus, hear every word he says, do

everything he does and yet still betray him in your own heart. Judas' sin destroyed him. His greed or we could say his love of something else over Jesus led to his downfall. The warning to us this morning is that of 1 Corinthians 10:12, 'let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.' You see Judas began well. He didn't know he was going to betray Jesus for greed. The bible says that the 'heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who can know it?' We don't even know the wickedness of our own hearts. That's why Jesus when teaching his disciples how to pray told them to ask that they might be 'delivered from temptation.' It is easy for us to look down on Judas with scorn but on this subject, a man once asked a famous theologian, "Why did Jesus choose Judas Iscariot to be his disciple?" The theologian replied, "I don't know, but I have an even harder question: Why did Jesus choose me?" It's only by the grace of God that we are saved. Let the life of Judas serve as a warning and humbling for us as it reminds us that it could be anyone of us apart from the grace and power of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. We need to keep Jesus at the centre of our lives and maintain a healthy relationship with him. Stay close to Him and don't let your heart wonder after other things.

And so as I draw to a conclusion this morning we are left with the challenge of a radical team who pursued the call that Jesus gave them with all their heart mind soul and strength. So my final question this morning is:

#### **What will you give your life for?**

The calling of the twelve Apostles gives us great hope because if they could go on to accomplish great things for the Lord then there is no reason why we cannot. This was a group of very ordinary guys that God poured out his Spirit on. Jesus could have gone to the temple or the top synagogues to choose the top students. But he didn't. He chose the guys that didn't really have the greatest resumes! Simon Peter would lose his temper. The two brothers James and John prioritize personal interest. Thomas shows a sceptical attitude. Matthew has become an enemy of the Jewish people by serving Rome. Simon is an anarchist; the list goes on! But if Jesus chose to use these men with their obvious weaknesses, and he did, he can also use you and I to advance his kingdom. God calls you this morning to make a difference in the world. God wants to use you in his plan for the salvation of the world. God desires that you respond to his calling on your life. Nobody can say they are not suitable. Of course we are called to different tasks within the kingdom and given various gifts to use and develop for the building up of God's church but the question is what you are doing with it? How are you stewarding your gifts and your talents? Are you serving faithfully in your area of gifting?

And so I encourage you this morning to pray. The bible tells us 'you have not because you ask not' God tells us to ask for wisdom and he will grant it freely. When you feel like you know what God is asking of you, go and do it with courage and boldness. You will undoubtedly hit hard spots and you may even doubt at times, but if God has called you he will enable you. I love what William Carrey, an old English Baptist missionary to India in the 1700's said; 'attempt great things for God, expect great things from God.' But it is in that order. We cannot expect God to move if we are not willing to be used. These 12 guys simply made themselves available for Jesus to use and they attempted great things for God. They went from being disciples; following Jesus round everywhere he went to apostles: ambassadors sent out on a mission.

But what if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian? One person said, 'these 12 men went from 'come and see' to 'go and die' And maybe that's you this morning: you have taken a good look at Jesus and you know what you have to do. You are putting off a decision for Christ but he calls you now to respond. The bible says in Romans 10:9, 'if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' Perhaps you feel Jesus is calling you to put your trust in Him this morning for the first time. You need to go from 'come and see to 'go and die' Not a literal death but a death of your old way of living to receive a new birth in Jesus Christ that will lead to everlasting life and a new sense of purpose; something to give your life for

Let's be people of purpose whose desire is to spend ourselves for Jesus. What better thing could there possibly be to spend your life on than him? These apostles gave their life for the gospel. And nearly all of them died horrible martyrs deaths. They grasped what their master meant when he said 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.' These guys all took up their crosses to follow Christ. All the powers of hell could not have convinced these guys that they were living a lie. They had been with Jesus; they had seen him die and they had seen him raised to life and they wanted to tell as many people about him as possible and to strengthen those who all ready believed. For these men it meant literally going from 'come and see to go and die' as history informs us that they were all were martyred for the sake of the gospel.

What a challenge to us this morning that these men, and countless other men and women have served Christ faithfully, sacrificially, often at serious risk to their lives, and often to the point of death to complete the mission that God has given them. We may not be martyred in our lifetime and we may not be apostles but we have a mission and we have been entrusted with the gospel, let's not serve Jesus Christ any less faithfully and obediently than they did.