



Central Peninsula Church

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The Cure for Extinction

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

What do the Albuquerque Isotopes have in common with the Altoona Curves? What do the Idaho Falls Chukers have in common with the Tulsa Drillers? And what do the Lansing Lugnuts have in common with Montgomery Biscuits? Believe it or not, those are all Minor League baseball teams. While most of us plan our visits to Pac Bell Park (or whatever it's called this year), thousands of people will purchase tickets to see teams like the Frisco Rough Riders and the Charleston River Dogs play ball this spring. Though most of us have never even heard of these teams, the fact is, the success of teams like the San Francisco Giants and the New York Yankees depends on teams like these. The reason for that is obvious: guys like Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens don't last forever; once they hit 40 everyone knows that the clock is ticking and their days playing baseball are numbered. It's true in baseball; it's true in corporate America; it's true in the church: success depends on selecting and training the right people in the right way to lead it in future generations. Present success can be deceiving. If you're not laying a foundation for the future, whatever it is you're trying to build will eventually collapse.

Jesus understood that. We've been studying the gospel of Luke, observing Jesus during his ministry in Galilee. Two things stand out. First, we've seen that Jesus is becoming very popular, attracting crowds, having a lot of success. But also we've seen that the opposition to him is mounting. Where there is light, there are bugs. Religious leaders have come from as far away as Jerusalem to check him out and they're ticked off. Starting in ch. 5 we've seen Jesus in a series of five confrontations which culminate in a statement Luke makes in 6:11.

“But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.”

As opposition mounted, Jesus could see the handwriting on the wall. His days on earth were numbered. Who would shepherd and lead the vast multitude of followers he would leave behind? Who would shepherd and lead those who came after them? It was this that propelled Jesus to begin preparing for the future. And the way he did that was not by trying to cover more ground

himself; not by preaching to more and more people; but rather by selecting twelve men that he would train to carry on the work when he was gone.

In doing this, Jesus models for us a timeless methodology. He concentrated upon a few. Robert Coleman writes, “His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes could follow.” If the Christian faith as a movement is going to thrive beyond the current generation; if churches like ours still want to exist 100 years from now, we'll have to do the same.

One of the things we should ask is how did Jesus figure out who he would select? Did he ask for volunteers? Did he take applications? Did he hold an election?

I. Devoted prayer (v.12).

Before Jesus made his selection, look what he did.

“And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.”

This shouldn't surprise us. If you go back to 3:21 when Jesus was being baptized, what was he doing? It says that **“while he was praying, heaven was opened.”** Move forward to chapter 4:42. After one of most demanding days of ministry he ever had, Luke says Jesus **“went to a secluded place.”** He wasn't watching TV out there; he was praying (cf. Mark 1:35). Move forward again to 5:16 where Luke makes a general statement of how Jesus would **“often slip away to the wilderness to pray.”** It's no surprise that when we come to chapter 6 we read that Jesus prayed all night long.

Jesus is modeling something for us. Even though he was God, he was also man. As a man, he modeled for us a life lived in dependence on the Father. Prayer is an expression of dependence. Like Jesus we need to learn to express our dependence upon the Father through prayer. What does Jesus teach us about how to do that?

It's interesting that we know Jesus was a man who lived in constant communion with his Father. I'm sure that never a moment went by that Jesus wasn't talking to his Father.

Nevertheless, Jesus also set aside extended times where he could be alone to pray. There was an intentionality about his prayer life that we can learn from. Prayer doesn't just happen by accident. This kind of prayer happens because we make room for it in our lives. You can't wait until you have time for it. Jesus didn't let the demands upon his life prevent him from prayer, as we often do, but rather he let those demands propel him to prayer. It's kind of like in a marriage. A couple can let all the demands of life drive them apart as they go in two different directions, or they can let those demands make them more committed to carving out time together. That's the only way a marriage will thrive over the long haul. It's no different in our relationship with God.

Notice also that during these times Jesus found a place where he could be alone. I don't know if Jesus had favorite places he would go or not, but it helps if we do. Where do you retreat to be alone and pray? Some people have the idea that the place to pray is in church. Certainly that's a good place to pray. There is a place for the church to come together and pray. But Jesus didn't restrict his prayers to the synagogue. Here he goes to the mountain. Earlier he went into the wilderness. His cathedral was the sky and the stars.

Finally, I want you to notice that one of the reasons Jesus prayed was to seek guidance. That's why Jesus prayed before he selected his twelve apostles. This was a monumental decision. I'm sure that he spent time bringing names of different people before his Father, seeking confirmation one way or another for each and every one. By the way, this is the only time we ever read that Jesus spent the entire night in prayer. That tells you how important the selection of leaders is.

Prayer is one of those things that most of us instinctively know we should do more of. Sometimes it feels a little bit like flossing our teeth—we know we should do it more, but we can't seem to bring ourselves to do it on a consistent basis. But let this be an encouragement to you. Keep at it. Not because you have to but because you need to. You've been invited into the throne room of the King of Kings. He wants to talk with you. He wants to encourage you and guide you. Don't neglect that invitation; take advantage of it.

II. Divine appointment (v.13).

After Jesus spent that night in prayer, he was ready to appoint his apostles.

“And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:...”

Some people have wondered why Jesus chose twelve. Jesus likely intended the number of apostles to correspond with the number of the tribes of Israel. The twelve tribes represented the people of God under the Old Covenant. Now he chooses twelve to show that a new people of God was coming into existence. That's why, after Judas fell away, the apostles needed to replace him. Twelve was a representative number. It communicated something important; God was forming a new community.

I'm struck by the series of verbs: *“he called...he chose...he named.”* By now he had hundreds of disciples, faithful followers, but he had to concentrate on a few, and so he called and chose and named just twelve to be his commissioned officers. Notice that these twelve did not apply for the job or run for office. Nor did he consult with them after selecting them. “Hey Simon, I'm thinking about starting a new ministry. Would you be interested in being one of my key leaders?” He didn't do that. He just said, “I want you, you, you, etc.”

In certain ways, Jesus has done this with each of us who follow him. He's called us, chosen us and named us. Not all of us are called to be apostle-like leaders, but we ARE all called to serve him; to be a witness for him; to use our gifts and to make a difference. And just as he did with the apostles, he has the right to call each of us into different areas of ministry. Where we serve and what we do is his choice, not ours. In 1Cor. 12:11 Paul says that the Spirit of God **“distributes (gifts) to each one individually as he wills.”** He determines what our gifts are and where we serve.

When Lynn and I got married, we wanted to be missionaries. Shortly after we got married, we went to Europe and spent some time with missionaries, and we came home wondering if we really were called to that. But we didn't let go of our dream. I went to seminary and during that time I got to know Dick Hillis, the founder of a mission organization called OC International. I told him that Lynn and I wanted to apply with his organization to serve overseas. He turned us down. He said we needed at least two years of experience working in a church here in the states. So I got a job in a church. That was 24 years ago. Somewhere along the line we looked at each other and said, “Maybe God hasn't

called us to the mission field after all.” That took some adjusting for us, but he gets to choose where we serve and what we do.

One of the great things about surrendering to his call is that when times of struggle and failure hit, it’s a great comfort to know that he called you and the responsibility for that choice is ultimately is on him. Think about Simon Peter. About a year and a half later he would deny Jesus three times. No doubt he would be tempted to think that he wasn’t made of the right stuff. He didn’t have what it took to be an apostle. But he could always go back to this moment when, after spending the whole night in prayer, Jesus called and chose and named him an apostle. You see, when God calls, he also equips. When someone comes to me and tells me they don’t feel they have what it takes to do what at one time they felt God was calling them to do, I usually say, “You’re right. You don’t have what it takes. But God has called you and he has what it takes. So you go out there and be faithful and let him take care of the rest.”

III. Diverse people (vv.14-16).

When you take a good look at the list of men who Jesus called and chose to be his apostles, you can see why they might feel that way.

“Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.”

There are two things that stand out about this list. First of all, they were just ordinary guys. None of them were highly educated scribes or highly disciplined Pharisees. As a matter of fact, in Acts 4:13, after Peter and John spoke before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Luke writes, **“Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed...”** Uneducated and untrained men! We know that at least four of them were commercial fishermen, one of them was a despised tax collector. We don’t know what the others did for a living but it doesn’t appear they went to Harvard or led Fortune 500 companies. Later, a well educated and well-known Pharisee named Saul was called as an apostle, so it’s not that Jesus is against education. But Saul was also a persecutor of Christians. So even with Saul he seems to use those we would least expect.

The second thing to notice about this list is that he calls people who would naturally be at odds with each other. For

instance, he called a tax collector to be a part of the same team as a Zealot. Matthew was a tax collector, which meant of course that he had sold out to the Roman government. He was a Jew who worked for Rome. But Simon was called the Zealot. The Zealots later became a radical political group working to free Palestine from Roman rule. He hated everything Rome stood for. Who in the world would put these two on the same team? This is like putting Hillary Clinton on the same team as Condoleeza Rice. On the surface it doesn’t make any sense.

One final observation from this list: one of the men Jesus chose turned out to be a traitor. That’s what Judas is called—a traitor. There is a mystery in this. Judas had the freedom to choose the course he took, but at the same time it was foreordained; it was in fulfillment of Scripture that he would do so. I believe that from the very start Jesus knew that Judas would be a traitor. But he chose him anyway. It strikes me that we can never guarantee that everyone who comes into the church and even into leadership will remain faithful. You can spend the whole night in prayer about these things but the reality is that sometimes people don’t turn out to be what you thought they were, and somehow that’s God’s plan. I think that’s the hardest part about ministry—when people you once trusted let you down or even betray you. But, at the very least, the selection of Judas tells us that we can expect that to happen once-in-awhile.

Why does Jesus choose the untrained and uneducated? Why does he put a tax collector together with a Zealot? Why does he allow a traitor like Judas to be among his apostles for three years? Because he wants to put on display the surpassing greatness of his love and power and grace. Listen to how Paul explains it, **“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God”** (1 Cor.1:26-29). If he called people who were talented and qualified, they would think, “Well, no wonder we’re so successful.” If all we had here were people who looked the same and came from the same backgrounds and voted the same, we would think, “Of course we love each

other." If we never had to deal with a Judas, we would think, "We've got this thing down pat." But God wants to display the surpassing greatness of his power and his love, so he calls unimpressive people; he makes people love each other who in the world would rather shoot each other; and he lets us deal with the pain and the heartache of being betrayed. All of it puts his power and love and grace on display.

CONCLUSION

So there you have it. Success depends on selecting and training the right people in the right way to lead in future generations. That's done prayerfully. That's done knowing that it's his choice and not ours. And that's done with an understanding that he chooses ordinary and diverse people to display the surpassing greatness of his power and love. That's the cure for extinction. You can do a lot of good things, but if you don't do that, whatever you build will eventually collapse.

Leroy Eims tells about a conversation he had with a missionary that has haunted him ever since. The missionary had been overseas for 15 years when they met. He had done the things missionaries normally do. About the time he had arrived overseas, he met a young man named Johnny. Johnny was a committed believer, but he felt Johnny was going about his ministry in all the wrong ways. Johnny was spending most of his time meeting with just a handful of young guys. The veteran missionary tried to get Johnny straightened out but Johnny kept on with his different approach. The years passed, and eventually the missionary made plans to go home.

As he sat across the table from Eims, he said,

"Leroy, I've got little to show for my 15 years here. Oh, there is a group of people who meet in our church, but I wonder what will happen to them when I leave. They're not really disciples. They listen to my sermons, but they don't really share their faith and they wouldn't know how to lead someone to Christ. They know nothing about discipling another person. Now that I'm leaving, I feel like I've all but wasted my time here."

Then he pointed out what had come out of Johnny's efforts. He pointed out how one of the men he worked with is now a university professor who God is using to lead scores of university students to Christ. Another is leading a team of about 40 young men and women who are spreading the gospel throughout the country. Three have gone out to other countries as missionaries and are leading teams who are leading others. And then he said, *"I was so sure I was right. What Johnny was doing seemed so small and insignificant, but now I look at the results, and the difference is staggering."*

Present activities and success can be deceiving. If you're not laying a foundation for the future, whatever it is you're trying to build will eventually collapse. Johnny had learned something from the Master: *"His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes could follow."* Success depends on prayerfully selecting and training the ones whom God has called to lead in future generations.

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