

July 14th - St James Festival - The Inclusive Church Journey

1 Cor 12:12-20

Mark 3:13 - 19

Jesus chose 12 disciples. There are several remarkable things about this.

It was the wrong way round for a start.

It wasn't just common or usual, but the **only** practice, for disciples to choose Rabbi's - not the Rabbi to choose the disciples!

And it was very normal, that the Rabbi would only accept the best and highest flying students to be his disciples - the ones who'd learnt all the Torah by heart, the ones who could afford to pay, the ones who would make the Rabbi look good.

The limit to 12 doesn't seem to be a regular feature of other rabbinical disciples - we think Jesus chose that number to be a new Israel - a fresh start for God's people.

But here's what I discovered in an assembly at St James - and just help me out here - we're going to get 12 people up, and you can see for yourself how remarkable it was that Jesus chose these 12.

So first we have - *get people up*

**Simon (Peter)** - fisherman - Capernaum - brother. We think possibly illiterate, not well travelled.

**Andrew** fisherman - brother - introduced Simon to Jesus, was a follower of John the Baptist

And introduced others. How well do families get on?!

**Sons of Jonah**

**James** - Fisherman - brothers

**John** - fisherman. - brothers

**Sons of Zebedee**

**James**, the Lesser or Younger - brother of Jude

**Jude** or Thaddeus - Brother of James - an extreme follower - believed so much in the Jewish people - Zealot, Zionist

**Judas** - treasurer, nationalist - violent group to overthrow the Romans

**Simon the Zealot**- another nationalist

**Matthew** (Levi) - tax collector - worked with the Romans

**Bartholomew or Nathanael** - Son of Tolomeus - Royal blood!

**Philip** - reaching out - helped at the feeding of the 5000 - a bit of Greek

**Thomas** - the twin - doubting, but also asked good questions

All **very** different - all part of the same team

*Go and sit down*

Jesus brought peace between people who were on different sides.

Jesus / God - can accept them all, can accept their differences.

The question was - can they accept each other?

They did not always agree. They certainly didn't hang around together after the day of Pentecost - scattered to the 4 winds.

But while they were with Jesus, they went on a Journey of difference - Just like we have.

Most of the time our friends and family are people like us,

We go to places where we see people like us, and even when we're not actually surrounded by people like us - we assume that we're all the same.

We don't notice the differences.

Part of the Inclusive Church journey has been to pay attention to the differences.

For the disciples Jesus first chose - What is it like to be different means - to be royal, to be an extremist, to be a fisherman or tax collector?

For us - the disciples Jesus chose to be in St James

- lets notice how women are treated differently to men.

- Lets notice the person wearing headphones or finding it difficult to be in this noisy place?

- lets think about what it might be like to be black, or poor, or gay?

Like the disciples - We've discovered many things on this journey -

They ended up fighting and disagreeing

- what was Jesus on about about the bread,

why did Jesus have favourites and who were they,

lets stop Jesus going to Jerusalem,

, and getting it all wrong -

they stopped the children coming to Jesus,

stopped the Samaritan women coming to Jesus

All of which is written to encourage us because that's our experience too - arguing and getting it all wrong - but Jesus still loves us all, and holds us all together.

So we've learnt some things about other people - sexuality and trans experience, what is neurodiversity, and the like.

But mostly we've learnt about our selves.

Like why do I think or believe that - is it the bible, or culture, or my friends?

Where do my beliefs come from?

How does the church decide things, and does it ever change those decisions.

We've had to wrestle with what's important about my faith?

And are there things that are more important than others?

If so, why?

And most importantly, that if I have these beliefs - how does that affect how I live.

That is big isn't it.

Because if I believe that God loves all people, well, how much do I love all people?

Its one thing to say we're a church that welcomes all!!

But do we really think that. = or should we say - Welcome, unless...

But here's a thing..

I think **I've** realised that although God may be inclusive of all,

Its not actually possible for us humanely to be inclusive to all -

We can't afford someone to do sign language at our services, just in case someone who speaks BSL comes in.

We can't have a service that is both structured and predictable to suit some neurodivergent, and loose and informal to suit others.

That a church that says its ok to be gay, may make it harder for people who are gay but feel called to celibacy.

And a church that wants to be inclusive, makes it harder for those who want the church be exclusive.

Can we be inclusive of those who aren't inclusive?

In other words, those who in conscience and prayer voted against joining Inclusive church or didn't vote?

Well I would hope so, because for one thing - we all have a line somewhere.

I repeat -

although God may be inclusive of all,

Its not actually possible for us humanely to be inclusive to all.

So we better make room for that! And be generous with ourselves and others.

Secondly - we have to be inclusive of those who aren't inclusive - because its not our choice.

This is not our church. Its Gods.

We are chosen to be here. You and me, are the one God wanted to be here, in this place, today.

St Paul reminds us in his great metaphor of the body -

Whether slave or free, Jew or Greek - and I might add - gay or straight, or man or woman

We are baptised into one body.

And just because the foot doesn't like the hand, you can't say - I do not belong to you.

And even if it said it - the foot would still be part of the body.

Gosh - how different are the parts of our body!

The eye and the toe - don't look the same, don't do the same things, how can it be that God called them both to be part of the body?

We probably all have our favourite parts of the body - the people in church we think are the best - is the warden or the vicar? The prophet or the one making all the cakes?  
But we need each other  
We are called by God to be one.  
And even if we take ourselves apart, we will still be one.

Because Jesus is our head. Jesus is the reason we're here.

And for his sake, we will wrestle and struggle and pray to work these things out, until we are taken or he returns, and we see things clearly at last.

So what comes next - after 6 months?

We will join Inclusive Church and go on their register of churches where people of all kinds know they can come safely to worship, without fear of discrimination or prejudice.

We can put the logo on our paperwork, and circulate their newsletter.

And we can go on thinking, and listening, studying and praying.

There are 6 areas that Inclusive church currently covers, and we have skimmed over some of them like disability or gender, and it will be good from time to time to come back to these.

Being Inclusive, like being Green, is not about getting gold or silver stars from A'Rocha or joining an organisation,  
Its not an attitude, not a one-off tick box.

So the journey, the walking with Jesus, carries on.