

Have you ever been down to the bank on late Friday afternoons to deposit a check? Are the lines long on Friday afternoons? Yes. Do you enjoy waiting in those lines? No. And you are pleased when you hear the voice of the bank manager echoing through the bank: ‘Tellers to the front window please.’ And you want those tellers to come immediately, when the line is long. Not in five minutes or ten minutes or fifteen minutes. The action is now. We need some extra workers now.

Have you ever been grocery shopping on Friday late afternoon about 5:30, when the lines are long at the cash register? The lines are so long. Do you enjoy standing in line for a long time, waiting for your turn at the cash register? Of course not. And so there is a sigh of relief when you hear the voice of the manager of the grocery store speaking through the loud speaker system: “Cashiers to the front please.” And you want them now. Not in five minutes. Ten minutes. Fifteen minutes. The crisis at hand is now and needs to be solved now, not in fifteen minutes.

It is with these images that we hear the famous teaching of Jesus when he says: “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send *workers...now!*”

Today, I would like to dig into the Gospel, the call of the disciples, and see how it applies to our ministry today. I would like to look at the

original calling of the first disciples and see how that calling for ministry then applies to our understanding of ministry today. I would like to look at the *original recipe* for discipleship. It is kind of like going to Kentucky Fried Chicken. You go to Kentucky Fried Chicken and they have the *original recipe*; but then they have all the later recipes for fried chicken. I would like to look at the *original recipe* for what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus and then examine how the original recipe has been changed through the centuries.

So, looking at the story for today, we discover that the first disciples were to carry a simple message: The kingdom of God is at hand. God is real; God is present; God is near to us, in us, around us, alive and powerful. There weren't sixty-six books in the Bible to memorize; nor a long doctrinal confession of faith to be recited. Their *original* message was very simple: the power and presence of God is alive, near and around you and in you.

Then, these first disciples had a simple method. Go to the needy. The sick and blind and crippled, those with leprosy, those who experienced death. Go to people who have a real felt need for God's help in their lives. Jesus later said: "Healthy people don't need a doctor; it is sick people who do." The disciples' original method was very simple: Go to those around you who have obvious needs for God to rule their lives,

who need the power and presence of God to help them.

Then, these first disciples had a simple but crucial attitude: compassion to those in need, those who were hurting. The Bible says that Jesus had compassion on them, like sheep without a shepherd, and the Greek word of “compassion” is deep feelings, gut feelings of love for the hurting. The way you reach people is with this attitude of compassion. Not with an attitude of cynicism: those people are all messed up and nothing can be done about it. Not with an attitude of condemnation: boy, did those people mess up their lives. Not with an attitude of constructive criticism: let me point out the ten mistakes that these people made to mess up their lives. Rather, the attitude of deep compassion is what makes ministry possible.

So, these first disciples had a simple message, a simple method to go to those who were hurting, and they had a simple but crucial attitude: compassion for those whose lives were messed up with pain.

Then, as part of this original recipe, Jesus chose twelve common and ordinary people to go and do his work. There was *not one* religious professional among them. Without cheating and looking back on your bulletin and Gospel reading for today, let's have you recall the names of the original twelve apostles. Shout out the names of the first twelve

disciples.

Peter? Yes, Peter, the big fisherman by trade. The leader type who cracked under pressure and denied Jesus three times when the going got tough. He also had a case of foot in mouth disease, often saying the wrong thing at the right time.

James? John? Yes, the two sons of thunder. They had thunderous tempers. . . And Ambitious. They wanted to sit at the head table at the future banquet. Not the meek and mild persons we often would expect to be disciples of Jesus.

Andrew? Yes, the kid brother of Peter. Always trying to live up to his brother's long shadow.

Judas? Yes, the greedy one. He sacrificed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Thomas? Yes, the doubter. He wanted proof that Jesus was raised from the dead. He was a natural born skeptic and even at the end at the Ascension, some of those disciples were still doubting.

Matthew? Yes, the tax collector. Half crook. Half businessman. Tax collectors will take financial advantage of you if they can.

Simon? Yes, Simon the Zealot. He was a political fanatic, liberal or

conservative we don't know, but he was a fanatic and probably wanted Jesus to be a political revolutionary. In the history of Christianity, people are always interested in using Jesus to further develop their own political agenda.

Bartholomew? Thaddeus? Don't know anything about them.

So, as we look at the original group of twelve, we find people who are *not* the heroes of faith; they are *not* in the "who's who" of religion; they are *not* the model citizens of our stereotype of the kingdom of God. Jesus chose twelve common and ordinary, *imperfect* people.

And you will notice that *not one of them* is a priest or rabbi or religious lawyer or prophet. Not one. What does this mean, that Jesus avoided all the religious professionals of the Old Testament people? This becomes important later in this sermon.

OK, so in the original recipe of discipleship; those first twelve disciples had a simple message, a simple method to those in need, a crucial compassion, and they were common and ordinary, imperfect people, with not one religious professional among them.

Now, these original twelve also had a dress code. These verses were not included in the lectionary reading, but in the following verses of Matthew's story. The disciples are told to carry no gold or silver with

them and they are to dress simply. One tunic. Two pairs of sandals. That's all. Now what is behind this? I am convinced that Jesus is aware that some people may be attracted to Christianity for the wrong reasons e.g. Christianity will make you healthy, wealthy, and rich. Fancy clothes and a bulging wallets may send the wrong message. The only thing the disciples have to offer is the kingdom of God, the power and presence of God to heal their lives, to make a difference in the way they live. Nothing more.

So, if these were the ingredients of the original recipe of discipleship, what does that mean for us today? How does this original recipe work itself out for us today?

First, the gospel of Christ is always directed to those are in need; to those who are hurting: the sick, the hungry, the poor, the weak, those whose lives are all messed up or screwed up.

In the original recipe among the original disciples, the first disciples always related Christ to the human need of their friends around them: blindness, leprosy, death, whatever it was. And so it is with disciples two thousand years later, we relate Christ to the deepest needs of the person we are talking with.

And the good attitude, the crucial attitude of compassion is so very

necessary. Not cynicism: you are stuck in your life situation and there is nothing that can be done. Not condemnation: look at all the little mistakes you have made to bring this disaster on yourself. Not constructive criticism: here are some suggestions that if you follow them, you will get better. Rather, Jesus' attitude was the compassionate love of God for the hurting person. Not cynicism or condemnation or constructive criticism.

And so at the heart of discipleship is reaching out to our friends and neighbors and strangers in need with the genuine love and compassion of God living inside of you. These *quality relationships of compassion* are the means, the simple method, that God uses to reach others.

A second thing we learn from the original disciples in the original recipe is that Jesus chose common and ordinary people to go and do his work. He *didn't choose* one religious professional. I would like to prove to you how this principle is still valid some two thousand years later. Researchers tell us *how* people come into the life of faith, and these researchers tell us that only *one fourth of one percent* come into the church by means of a famous evangelist or TV evangelist. So I ask you here today and I need a show of hands: how many of you were brought to faith initially or brought to church initially because of a famous evangelist, at a revival or on TV? Could I see your hands? Not one. A

second question: how many of you were initially brought to faith because of a mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, brother, sister, or friend? Could I see your hands? Hmmmm. It looks like all of you were brought that way. Now, a third question: how many of you were *initially* brought to faith or the church because of a pastor? .

What this proves to me and you is that Jesus' original recipe is still working. That is, people are *still* brought to faith and church by religious *non*-professionals. You were *all* brought to faith and church by some common and ordinary persons. That's the way it was in the original recipe.

You have proven to me and yourselves that it is not pastors and evangelists but that it is the everyday people like you that God uses to bring people to faith and church.

A third thing we learn from the original recipe is the prayer: Lord of the harvest, send workers...now. We need to be praying for the Lord to send more workers out into the bountiful harvest. We also need to be prepared for the possibility that we may be the answer to the prayer. God might answer by saying, " I am sending you as a worker in the field to show hospitality and compassion at the funeral luncheon. Or I am

sending you two at a time to start small groups for people who are lonely and looking for spiritual friendships. O I am sending you to help with children's ministry of youth ministry." We may be the answer to the prayer we have been lifting up. Our God answers prayers in amazing an unexpected ways. Be open to how you may be the answer to someone's prayer because the Good News is that the harvest is plentiful!