

11 - CHOOSING THE TWELVE

Luke 6:12-19

Prayer came habitually to Jesus. His ministry thus far had been entirely of an individual nature. As the previous incidents revealed, his teaching and healing had become extremely popular with the crowds and not a little contentious to the authorities. Now, Luke asserted, he realized that he could not carry on alone. He needed a team who could share his ministry in very specific ways.

Who could help him? There appeared to be many who could have been considered his close followers - people who had "left everything and followed him." (6:13) That was a decision he had to make in prayer. But why did he choose only twelve to be "apostles"?

The answer to that question is found in the place he went to pray - on a mountain alone all night. The parallel with Moses on Mount Sinai communing with God before receiving the authoritative Law seems obvious. As with so much else in the Gospel story, the number he chose also recalls the twelve patriarchs and twelve tribes of Israel in the Book of Numbers. Yet that is not the whole story.

In a little monograph, *The Footprints of Jesus' Twelve in Early Christian Traditions*, (Lang, 1985, Heinz Guenther, late Professor of New Testament at Emmanuel College Toronto, pointed out that twelve was a most significant number in theological but not historical terms. It represented the views of the post-Easter church, not of Jesus himself.

Guenther claims that there is no historical evidence of twelve as claimed in this passage or parallels in the other Gospels. He concluded: "The twelve were created because they seemed to be the most suitable agents the church could ever have in its attempt to illustrate the secret of God's saving love to the world." Thus the number was confessional and had important meaning for the church's own identity.

Faith does not create history, it creates a confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. It states the church's claim to be an apostolic community "representing 'twelveness' ... ready to confess Jesus Christ, assuming responsibility with him for an imperiled world."

As for the names of the twelve, there is no historical evidence other than the gospel stories that such a group existed. Later Christian traditions gave each of them some semblance of reality, mostly on the basis of legendary accounts of martyrdom. None of the existing variants of the names can be adequately explained. Luke included two names that the other Gospels do not mention - Simon the Zealot and Judas, son of James. Simon appears as "Thaddeus" in Matthew and Mark.

The last paragraph of this passage (6:17-19) forms a transition to a new section of the Gospel to follow. The setting is no longer a mountain, but a level plain. The geographical origins of the people gathered to hear Jesus or to be healed by him indicate the universality of his appeal. The modern church has not been mistaken in using every means of communication to encourage faith in him.