

“Team”

Luke 6:12 – 16; 8:1 - 3

The first is Luke 6 verse 12:

“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.”

The next is Luke 8 verse 1:

“After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases:

Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”

If you can, cast your minds back to your school days and playing sports or games at break times.

I don’t know if this ever happened to you but often I’d play a game at lunchtime and there would be two guys, usually of the same ability, who would pick teams. They’d be like the team captains.

Then from the rest of the group they would pick one player at a time.

There’s Brett, he’s been picked. There’s Jonno; he’s on that team.

Anyone ever had this happen?

So for me, this not good because as a I’ve said before, at school I was a nobody.

I wasn’t in the “cool” crowd or the “uncool” crowd.

I was in-between because I was average.

I was an average student.

I had an average social life.

Some people touch things and they turn to gold; well I touched things and they turned to average.

And that applied to sports as well.

So there was this gnawing, anxious feeling and it was this: the fear of being picked last.

To be picked last meant you're the guy on the team that nobody really wanted. It's almost like you're in a team because of a sympathy vote.

“Has anything like that ever happened to you?”

And it seems that kind of picking and choosing doesn't stop.

Now it a place for merit and ability – we should honour and encourage these.

Our problem is we confuse these with people's dignity and worth.

Now when we do read about Jesus He was very much about the “us” and the “we” and he was very much about the team.

That's what we find in our readings this morning.

However when he does choose his people, his team, it's not on the basis of merit or ability.

As I mentioned, we can have this notion that only certain people warrant God's acceptance.

So we come to God with our plus's and our minuses, our abilities and our achievements, and we think those outweigh the negatives – the faults, the failures, the character flaws and sin in our lives.

However, for one, we don't how deep our defects go, and two, how fair is that?

I mean there are some people who get all the advantages in life, which enable them to do well.

They have a head start in life and so had the wherewithal to do good things.

But what of those who have not had such advantages.

What of those who have been brought up in dysfunctional families and as children have been deeply hurt. And because of their backgrounds they just can't get their act together.

They're too hurt and twisted up.

If it comes down to it, a lot of us haven't got a show of getting into Jesus' team.

And you see, this is where the gospel of Jesus Christ is so much better and fairer and more inclusive.

How do we know this?

Ephesians tells us:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. ...now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”¹

The gospel of Jesus Christ is that moral failures, whoever and wherever they are, once forgiven by Christ, are no longer a determining factor. That no matter what you have done or who you are, you can still be embraced fully and instantly by Jesus. We are chosen on the basis of Jesus’ merits and abilities and accomplishments and not our own.

We hear this same idea in 1 Corinthians:

“Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.”²

Then what Jesus does is he says here’s my team. He then introduces you to the other teams members.

I mean, you see it here in these passages. For example, you have Matthew. What was Matthew’s occupation? He worked for the Roman equivalent of the IRD. He collected tax for the Romans. Matthew was viewed with deep suspicion.

Then you have Simon who was called the Zealot. That meant he was either part of a revolutionary movement that wanted to overthrow Roman occupation or he was zealous for the Law of Moses. He would have had real problem with Roman taxation... Either way, he was *intense*. Have you ever spent time with an intense Christian?

Then we have Mary (called Magdalene) who was demonised and had to freed from seven demons. To be demonised meant to be tormented, acting in erratic ways. And we Joanna whose husband worked for a man who wanted Jesus eliminated...

¹ Ephesians 2:9 – 10, 13.

² 1 Corinthians 1:26

Ed met Pastor Joe while he was still in High School back in the early '70s. I'd given his life to Christ about two years before but was still wore the clothes and hairstyle that were popular for my generation. And Pastor Joe was concerned.

So one day Pastor Joe said, "I'm concerned about you, Ed. I feel like you are still carrying the marks of worldliness. The Scriptures tell us to love not the world neither the things that are in the world. And I fear you are in love with the world."

Ed was taken aback because in Ed's mind he had really sold out for God in my heart, "Why do you think that?"

"Why, look at how you are dressed – and your hair. You look like a hippie. You are communicating rebellion, sexual promiscuity and drug usage everywhere you go."

Ed writes:

The truth is clothing and hairstyles do not necessarily reflect what is going on in the heart. I was certainly not dressing lewdly (remember the baggy legged dishevelled hippie look of the '70s?) and though I looked like what was associated with drug addiction and youthful rebellion in Pastor Joe's mind, I was just dressing the way kids my age dressed.

Pastor Joe went on to ask, "Don't you admit that what we wear speaks to people?"

"I guess," Ed replied.

"Well, what do you think your clothing is speaking, versus what I am wearing."

Ed's reply, "I think my clothing is saying, 'I like to be comfortable.'"

But Pastor wasn't buying it.

He told me Ed that Ed needed to wear what he was wearing.

Pastor Joe always wore dark pants; black shoes; a pressed, white shirt; and a plain, dark tie. He would have looked like a stand-in for The Blues Brothers, but he had a 1961 haircut, so he wasn't nearly as cool.

Ed told him he couldn't imagine wearing what he had on.

Then Ed said as kindly as he could... that if he tried to dress like him Ed's friends would think that I thought it was Halloween.

The conversation went south from there.

The thing is, Ed and Joe... are both on the same team.
And this team has a name: it's called the church.

In other words, the team that Jesus captains ranges from the normal to the average to someone who's more likely to score an own goal than a screamer from half-way, to the odd, the quirky, the unusual to the annoying and exasperating.

And that's good news because you will fit right in!

Then what Jesus does is he goes to work on our lives.

Our faults and flaws begin to be highlighted.

But not only, Jesus takes the good and the beautiful in us and he *makes it better*.
He takes gifts and talents you naturally have and he enhances these.

Alongside these he supernaturally by the Holy Spirit endows you with new gifts and abilities, alongside a new desire to see these in use.

All of that means is Jesus makes you a betterer you.

For me it meant I was average but now... I think I'm above average.
(Now you have a slightly above average pastor 😊).

And, as I was reminded last week, when Jesus puts His team together, he says, "I want you to be on my team. And I will gift you and enable you to play in this position over here.

I don't want you to be over here; that is someone else's position. I want you to be here. It is here that you will make a difference for my kingdom."

Each one of you has been gifted by our King, our Leader, our Captain.
You have a role to play; do not ever think differently.

To close: Jesus has never stopped calling people into His team.

He calls you by name.
When he sees you his eyes light up!
And He says, "I want you in my team!"

The question for everyone is this: will you respond?