

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Seventh Sunday after Easter: May 16, 2021

“The Called”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good Morning, on the Sunday after Christ’s ascension into heaven - which was celebrated this past Thursday. So we have in today’s scripture Jesus speaking to God the Father and giving a blessing to the disciples, to those who he has called.

*“They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.”*

Have you ever wondered what really happened to them? Did you ever think about how Jesus’ truth played out in the disciples’ lives? Well, there is a reason they say discipleship is hard. What happened to the disciples moving forward in their faith resembled what they had witnessed at the cross. Yes, Jesus prayed that they not have to bear the same cup as himself, but he already knew they would. Yet, even though their lives and deaths may seem to be tragic, they fulfilled their calling and faith to the end, with joy. It is because of them, we are here today.

Being called to a life of faith is not always an easy choice, and there is no guarantee that being the “chosen” one will make your life into a feel-good movie. But to live your life in faith, where ever that takes you, is priceless. So I thought I would answer the question: what ever happened to the twelve?

Most historians know that **Peter** and **Paul** were both martyred in Rome about 66 AD, during the persecution under Emperor Nero. Paul was beheaded and Peter was

crucified, upside down at his request. He chose to be upside down because he did not feel he was worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

**Andrew**, it is said, went to the "land of the man-eaters," in what is now known as Russia. Christians there claim him as the first to bring the gospel to their land. He also preached in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and in Greece, where it is said he was also crucified.

**Thomas**, the disciple who was filled with doubt, became one of the most active in the area east of Syria. Tradition has him preaching as far east as India, where the ancient *Marthoma* Christians revere him as their founder. They claim that he died there when four soldiers pierced him through with their spears.

**Philip** may have possibly had a powerful ministry in Carthage, North Africa and then in Asia Minor, where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul. For this conversion the proconsul had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

**Matthew**, the tax collector and the possible writer of the Gospel, ministered in Persia and Ethiopia. Some of the oldest reports say he was not martyred, while others say he was stabbed to death in Ethiopia.

**Bartholomew** had widespread missionary travels attributed to him by tradition: to India with Thomas, back to Armenia, and also to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of how he met his death as a martyr for the gospel.

**James**, the son of Alpheus, is one of at least three Jameses referred to in the New Testament. There is some confusion as to which is which, but this James is reckoned to have ministered in Syria. The Jewish historian Josephus reported that he was stoned and then clubbed to death.

**Simon the Zealot**, so the story goes, ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

**John** is the only one of the apostles generally thought to have died a natural death from old age. He was the leader of the church in the Ephesus area and is said to have taken care of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in his home. During Domitian's persecution in the middle '90s, he was exiled to the island of Patmos. There he is credited with writing the last book of the New Testament--the Revelation.

And lastly, **Matthias**, the final apostle, chosen to replace Judas, went to Syria with Andrew and was burned to death.\*

So now that we all feel good about discipleship, where does that lead us today? For as much as Christianity has been whitewashed at times to be a feel-good religion claiming that with a life of prayer and good morality you will receive blessings; history tells us this is not the truth.

What history tells us, is that living a life like Jesus, a life filled with compassion, with love and with grace, may in fact, get you killed. And yet that doesn't mean you are abandoned by God. Jesus in today's scripture tells us that God knows us, and we have been called by him. Even when we feel lost, we are not lost to God. Even when we feel cursed, there is a blessing just on the other side, even to death.

We are called to live out our lives as Jesus would desire us to live out our lives. We are called to community, to forgiveness, to compassion and love. Living this way is not always easy, even among family members, yet there is an inward joy that comes from the soul when we try. Living this life of community, forgiveness, compassion and love, is not of the world. It seems that view has not changed even now, as we see selfishness and violence continue, sometimes with the church's blessing.

I suspect few of us, if any, will be stoned or burned at the stake for our faith, or crucified upside down in the name of Jesus. At least not in this country right now. But yet, it could happen. Please don't think the Christian life is a watered down, white-washed religion with a sparkling clean Jesus smiling down from heaven, fixing all your problems. We are the followers of a savior who was broken, beaten, bleeding, and pierced. We are the believers of a man who while hanging on a cross forgave those who nailed him there. Yet we are also the faithful of those who Jesus called blessed: the meek, the justice seeker, the peacemaker, the grieving and the lost – all blessed. We are the follower of the lover of souls, the healer of the leper, the desolate and lost, the shepherd who will not let one sheep go astray.

We are now the called, just as the disciples were called. Fortunately our outcome does not look as grim as those who went before us. Be inspired by Jesus' calling, be fearless like our apostles' example and go out to love and serve the Lord in singleness and gladness of heart, in all you do, knowing it may not be easy, but it is worth it today, tomorrow and to eternity. Amen

\*Ken Curtis, PhD. "*Whatever Happened to the Twelve Apostles?*" Christianity.com, accessed May 15, 2021.