

"Can I Give Them Your Name?"

Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 9:35-10:10

August 31, 2008

Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddeaus, Simon, and Judas. These are the twelve disciples. They are listed here, in this text, by name. These are the faithful, core members of Jesus' church. For all practical purposes this is the Church Council, this is the inner circle, these are the men who get things done, the true builders of the kingdom, the real followers of Jesus, the disciples, the workers

But this list doesn't include all who followed Jesus. Time and again we read of great crowds following Jesus. Often times the text will even refer to other people as disciples. But the thing is, that, often these other people, the text tells us, would fall away; either because of some hard teaching of the kingdom that they couldn't accept, because Jesus wasn't the revolutionary leader that they wanted, or sometimes because Jesus refused to be their personal miracle machine. Countless times the scriptures tell us of great crowds of disciples, followers of Jesus, nameless disciples, who would eventually leave the church of Jesus. Then Jesus would retreat with the twelve, the disciples who are named, the faithful, the core members, the steadfast....the workers....

And this often gives me a sense of comfort, that Jesus had the same problems with His church that we have with the church today. Because the truth is, in most every church there are those who are named and there are those who, at least as far as the kingdom of God is concerned, are nameless. There are those who are the core

members of a church, the true builders of the kingdom, the real followers of Jesus, the disciples...the workers....And there are those who we know more by face than by name. Because they prefer to remain anonymous. Their involvement as disciples is limited, and often they will fall away; either because of some conflict or some change they don't like.

Now sometimes God moves in their hearts and they mature in their faith and they gain a name. They become builders of the kingdom of God. But more often than not, as far as ministry and actually building God's kingdom, they are not named. And that is why these words ring today....as true as they did with the church of Jesus' time.

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL, BUT THE WORKERS ARE FEW!!!!!!!

Now for some of you here today, this message might make you a little uncomfortable. Others of you may be tempted to puff up your chest and look smugly around the congregation. For various reason, we don't all participate equally in the ministries of the church. This is not something that is up of debate, it's a fact! But understand right now that my purpose is not to make anyone feel uncomfortable, nor do I set out to pat you on the back either. The thing is God loves all of us. God loves the faithful as well as the faithless. Everyone can't serve equally in ministry, because we are not equal; are all very different. Some of us are more talented than others, some of us have more time than others, some of us are farther along in our faith journey than others. But none of that changes the fact that Jesus is right. The harvest is plentiful and the workers are few.

Let me give you some statistics to prove my point here.

80% of the financial resources of a church are provided by 20% or it's members.

85% of the ministries of the church have active leadership participation by less than 15% of the members

In a large church with multiple staff that number drops to less than 10% because the membership rationalize that either the staff can do it better or we don't need to do it because that's what we pay them for.

And a church's average worship attendance is less than 40% of the actual membership. I'm not making this up these are the actual statistics. True, they are generalized, but more often than not they are so right on the money that it's almost scary. The workers are few!

The harvest if plentiful!

65% of the people in the U. S. claim some kind of Christian religious affiliation. Yet, 85% of the population is Unchurched, which means they enter into the doors of the church no more than 2 times a year or not at all,

Most of that 85%, though claim a Christian heritage, have not been baptized, can't tell anyone else how to really know God and often doubt the existence of God. And some of that 85% are people who are now being referred to a De-churched! At one time they were very active in a church. They may have even had a name. But they grew disillusioned or burned out and they left the church. The harvest is plentiful!

America, the home of the brave, the land of the free. America, one nation under God, it says so right there on our money! America,

which at one time was recognized as a Christian Nation.

America is now seen by many countries as a mission field. America where the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. And I know that deep down this doesn't surprise many of you. Because the truth is that you know many of the unchurched and the de-churched people that I am talking about there this morning. You know their name. I know some of their names. But the pertinent question for you today is, Do they know your name?

Do they know you as a connection to God?

The people who have no connection to God. The people who don't know Jesus. The people who live with little hope and no purpose, who are alone, dispossessed, who have been beaten up by life, who simply exist from day to day, who don't know that this life is not all there is, Do they know your name?

Or how about the people who don't God, who believe that they are bulletproof, who live only for themselves, who believe that money and success and things are all there is, but who will one day, either in this life or the next, find that their life was actually empty and meaningless. Do these people know your name?

What I'm asking you is if you are a disciple with a name?

Or if you're just an unnamed follower who really doesn't do much for the kingdom of God? What I'm asking you to do today is to take personal inventory of your spiritual life, from God's perspective, from the perspective of the field which is in great need of being harvested. Are you a worker? Do you have a name?

Now the problem may be that you believe that you're not good enough. You think that because your life is not perfect that you

can't be a worker. Or maybe you believe that you don't have any talent, nothing to contribute, that somebody else can do it better. BALONEY!!!!!!

Have you really looked at the disciples? I mean are real good hard look at the core members of Jesus' traveling church. A ragtag group of fishermen, one was argumentative, arrogant and boastful. A tax collector who was seen by all of his family and friends as a traitor to the faith. A thief who would steal out of the church offering plate. Two brothers who were always complaining and once had their mommy approach Jesus asking for special treatment. This wasn't the cream of the crop, and yet they were chosen. Because Jesus was not as concerned about who they were as much as who he knew they could become. And all they had to do was to follow..and follow they did.

When all the other nameless disciples fell away, they remained. Jesus sent them out with authority....all of them!!! Yes, even Judas. The text says he sent twelve out. Verse 8 of this text says that he told them to go out, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, cast out demons. Everything that he was doing, he gave them authority to do!! This messed up, no talent group of ragtag disciples, the ones named.

The Gospel of Mark tells us that they went out and preached that people should repent, they drove out many demons and they healed many people. Luke says they preached the gospel from village to village, healing people everywhere they went. These no talent, misfit disciples who Jesus named.

There was a woman who had been singing in her church choir for as

long as anyone could remember. She decided to hang up her robe. She didn't retire, mind you, she quit, not just the choir but the church. If you ask her why she quit, she would tell you; "no one cares!" She would say..."I sat up there in that choir loft one morning and looked around at the other choir members, I looked at the minister and the worship leader, I looked at the ushers, I looked out over the congregation and I said to myself those words that have haunted me for years, "Who cares?" And what the woman was really saying was that it wasn't a church. The church member that she was speaking too exclaimed, "You're wrong, this is a church. In fact I go to different churches all the time. I grew up in church. I see people all the time who reach out to other people, who love people who are not like them, who sincerely love and care for people, who do their best to be like Jesus." The woman said, "Where?" The congregation member said, "everywhere I go there are people who care not just about themselves but about everyone. They care and it shows by how they reach out to people who are hurting, by how they witness their faith to others." The woman said, "Oh really?!"...."Really" came the response. The woman said, "name some!".....

What we need to know today my good Christian friends is....."Can I give them your name?"

The people who don't know Jesus, who have never had anyone care enough about them to tell them about Jesus, who are dispossessed, who are friendless and alone, who live with little or no hope...Can I give them your name?

The people who don't believe they need God, who live their lives attempting to find happiness in all the wrong places, who fill their

time running after money, who if things don't change...will live and die without ever knowing the love of God.

It's a good news, bad news kinda day folks! The good news is the harvest is plentiful, the bad news is the workers are few!! God needs some disciples with names. Can I give him your name?