

Ordinary to Extraordinary Week 9: Role players

We are now one church with Beaverton congregation. We will be one church in two locations. Because this is new, we thought it was time for a new logo. Old logo...new logo...two locations.

Here is our **de facto theme** verse. Really smart people choose a theme verse at the beginning of a series. I choose one near the end. **Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 1 Corinthians 1:27**

We are looking at the 12 apostles, Jesus' team that he chose, trained, transformed, and then used to spread the gospel across the world.

- ✓ Transformed these ordinary men into extraordinary.
- ✓ Put together an extraordinary team from very ordinary men.

We have looked at the **first tier** of disciples, those men who were closest to **Jesus: Peter, Andrew, James, and John**. The second group was **Phillip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas**. The third group is who we are looking at today.

Finally, we get to the last grouping. These are the ones we **know the least** about. They **aren't the stars**, but rather the ones with **bit parts** in the show. They are not the **ones on the team that everyone knows** because they score all of the touchdowns, goals, or points. **They are what we would call role players**. They are on the team and they contribute, but no one is probably in the stands **wearing these guys' Jersey**. Back when we used to try to encourage our kids to dress up as biblical characters, instead of Freddy Kreugger, no kids said, **"Dad I want to dress up like James, the son of Alphaeus."** They aren't **flashy**, but rather steady. Many times what they do doesn't show up on the stat sheet.

But before we get to our three role players, **we need to set a baseline for the whole team. What can we say about the whole gang, excluding Judas Iscariot?**

Here is a passage that tells us volumes about Jesus' team that he called. **So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. ⁵⁴ But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me,**

and I in him. ⁵⁷ I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. ⁶⁰ Many of his disciples said, "**This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?**" No kidding. If we can't understand it, how can we accept it as truth? ⁶¹ Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, "**Does this offend you?**" ⁶² Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again?... ⁶⁶ At this point **many of his disciples turned away and deserted him.** ⁶⁷ Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, I'm begging you, please don't leave; this thing is falling apart. No he said... "**Are you also going to leave?**" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God. ⁷⁰ Then Jesus said, "I chose the twelve of you, but one is a devil." ⁷¹ He was speaking of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, one of the Twelve, who would later betray him. John 6:53-61& 66-70

What you can't do is read this with the perspective of how the rest of the story is going to play out. If you do that, you take the real shock value out of what Jesus is saying and doing.

"What just happened? Everything was so positive, all of that talk about the Kingdom of God and eternal life. Jesus is healing people and there are huge crowds following him...and then it turned weird. Is the pressure of public expectation getting to him?"

Eat my flesh and drink my blood? This is not the way to win friends and influence people.

This is something that a politician will never do. This is what we call thinning the herd. Every fall, thousands of deer are shot during gun season. It seems like a lot of deer. But what it does, is that it thins the herd. It keeps the deer from overpopulating and the herd stays healthier. There's enough food and space to keep them from running wild in our neighborhoods and causing car crashes on the freeway.

Jesus wanted a pack, not a mindless herd. It wasn't that he didn't love those who left. It's that he knew their hearts. He taught this way to help reveal their hearts. Their feet would tell him whether or not they were going to be with him or not. He wanted to see who the father was giving him and start pouring into them.

A worldwide movement starts small and then multiplies and spreads. There's a point when it looks like nothing is happening, but really everything is happening. It doesn't start with a mindless herd of people who just want to see a miracle and follow someone who will defeat their enemies and help put them on top above the suffering they have known.

Jesus found out who was not easily scared off. He knows what it's going to take to follow him to the cross and then after.

Did the 12 stay because they understood what Jesus was saying? Did they stay because the graphic language he was using didn't disturb them? No, they didn't know what he was talking about, the same as the people that left. The difference was they trusted Jesus enough to stay even when they didn't understand. Let me say that again. The difference was that they trusted Jesus enough to stay even when they didn't understand.

The philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard calls this "the offense". He said that the only path to real faith was through "the offense". You had to be with Jesus when he says something or does something that offends you. Kierkegaard says that at that point if we will push through the offense and trust Jesus anyway, then we have real faith. The kind that sticks around, that perseveres that is durable, not fragile.

If you stick around Jesus for more than a minute he will do, say, or allow something to happen that will offend you. That's what kings do. Politicians don't, but kings with real authority do. They love enough to offend.

The 12, or at very least the 11, pushed through this offence and now Jesus will get to work on them.

That's what we know about the team. Now for this final group of lesser-known disciples... What did these 3 add to the team? Jesus has thinned the heard so there are no groupies, fans, or hanger on'ers. These are the ones who love and trust Jesus because he is the one with the words of eternal life. He is the messiah, Christ, Son of God.

James, the son of Alphaeus, is also called James, the less. Could be because of height, or that he was younger, but most likely it is because he was much less prominent. He might have been a small, young, and quiet person who stayed in the background. 281-82

James is an example of what was true about all of them. They were obscure in the background.

James, son of Alphaeus, was ok with being a role player on the team.

Do you know what a role player is? A role player knows what he or she needs to do for the success of the team and doesn't care if credit is given. They do the little things, the dirty work that doesn't show up in the stat sheet or the newspaper article after the game.

James had the same attitude that John the Baptist had. John had a pretty good following when Jesus showed up. He was a prophet that people would travel into the wilderness to hear speak. He was getting people back to the idea of repentance. They weren't living like God's people and he wasn't pleased. They needed to repent and be baptized into a new life as true followers of the God of Israel. And yet when Jesus came, he pointed his followers to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the people's sin.

John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' ²⁹ It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. ³⁰ He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. John 3:27-30

Who says that? No one will say that this election year. Well, I think James the less would have said that. He didn't need the spotlight or to be out front like Peter and the guys closest to Jesus. He just wanted to play his role for the savior.

He became a powerful preacher like the others and performed miracles. These were the signs of an apostle. He is thought to have taken the gospel to Syria and Persia. Accounts of his death differ from stoning, to being beaten to death, to being crucified like Jesus. 283

What do we know? He was chosen, empowered, trained, and used by God to take the gospel to the world.

Next, we have Simon the Zealot. What did he add to the team? James brought an attitude that didn't demand recognition or the spotlight. I'll just do what needs to be done. If it's going to get coffee, then I'll do it.

To answer this question, we have to understand what a zealot is.

In our terms, Zealots above all, are true believers. They aren't warm, they are hot. They are all in and nothing else matters but the cause, the group, the lifestyle that they are zealous about.

I met some zealots in Orlando, Florida at Universal studios. We were eating at a café right near the Harry Potter section of the park. We had a question about the park or where something was located. I suggested we ask one of the workers who were dressed up in costumes like characters in Harry Potter. As we ate, I realized that they weren't workers. They came to the park dressed in full costume of characters from the movies. They were zealots, people who were not merely interested in Harry Potter, it was their life.

Back then, zealots were violent revolutionaries because they believed that no one could rule Israel other than God. They were like the Pharisees, but not willing to compromise politically. Were willing to die and were legendary in the ability to withstand torture.

- ✓ **Carried long knives hidden in the folds of their robes for assassinations.**
- ✓ **In the rebellion of Judas the Galilean they burned Jerusalem and killed many of the people in order to not leave anything for the Romans.**

He was on the same team with a tax collector! A zealot would have called him a traitor and wanted to kill him.

He was probably sent out with Judas. They both likely joined for political reasons. At some point, Simon became a genuine believer while Judas did not.

"When Jesus did not overthrow Rome, but instead talked of dying, some might have expected Simon to be the betrayer—a man of such deep passion, zeal, and political convictions that he would align himself with terrorists. But that was before he met Jesus. " 290

What did he bring to the team? He brought energy, passion, and yes, zeal because...The object of Simon's zeal changed.

You see people with this sort of single-minded focus and energy don't become mild mannered librarians and accountants on Jesus' team. They remained as fiery and passionate for Jesus as they were for killing Romans. Now he know that Rome isn't the problem, it is sin and unbelief. Rome was a symptom, not the disease for Israel.

Simon was still the zealot. He was the energy guy for the team. He got them pumped up because he just wouldn't stop and he wouldn't compromise.

Are you an energy person, but Jesus is simply something that you dabble in, but your passion goes to something else? Simon brought this to the team.

Legend has it that he went north after Jerusalem was destroyed and preached the gospel in the British Isles. He was killed for preaching the gospel.

Finally we come to the guy who unfortunately had the same name as the most notorious traitor in history. Let's meet Judas, Son of James, and see what he adds to the team.

Judas (not Judas Iscariot, but the other disciple with that name) said to him, "Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself only to us and not to the world at large?"

²³ Jesus replied, "All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. ²⁴ Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. ²⁵ I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. ²⁶ But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. John 14:22-26

Judas, son of James wanted everyone to know.

Judas wasn't trying to get a corner on the market. He wasn't trying to keep people from doing miracles who weren't in their little club. He wasn't looking to call down fire on a Samaritan village. He wasn't even talking about just Israel. He wanted everyone to know who the real king was. He wanted them to know who the one who would give them eternal life.

Yes, there was probably something in his desire for everyone to hear so that the Kingdom would come in a more tangible way than Jesus was talking about.

Notice Jesus' answer. Yes, I will reveal myself to anyone who is willing to believe and follow me. You get to see because you have already been drawn to me by my Father. I'm not going to take over the world, but rather I'm going to take over people's hearts.

And, by the way Judas, you are going to be a part of revealing me to all people. You, and the rest of this team are going to take my message and my presence through the Holy Spirit to the ends of the earth.

That's a bridge builder and an ambassador. That's what God wants us to be.

Do you have a desire for all people to see who Jesus is?

Most early traditions have it that he did this very thing. He took the gospel north to Edessa, a royal city in Mesopotamia in what is now Turkey. Wanting everyone to see who Jesus was, Judas healed **Abgar, the king of Edessa.** The ancient historian Eusebius detailed his activities.

All three were killed for preaching Jesus, the role player who didn't need the spotlight, **the one who became zealous about Jesus** and the one **who wanted everyone to know Jesus.**

But remember, these three were in that group that Peter spoke for when he said, "where could we go, you have the words of eternal life." The role player, the energy guy and the tender-hearted guy all had faith that was established by pushing through being offended by Jesus. **They were not easily chased or scared off** by talk about flesh and blood. **That's why they weren't scared off when their preaching of Jesus took them** across the world and into harm's way. **That tough, durable faith was established so that the role player could continue without applause, the zealot could continue to burn hot and the tenderhearted one could reach even kings.**

So what about us? This isn't just an interesting historical look at the least known of the 12. We are challenged to see ourselves in these men and then to do something about it. That's why we call this part...**Steps of obedience.** I'm not talking about the final word, but a step. Each man had to take many steps toward the kind of faith that would grow into a willingness to preach anywhere, any time, danger or not.

The steps are up to you as God is leading you. I believe the lives of James the less, Simon the Zealot and Judas my name is not Iscariot, are asking two key questions that can push us to action.

This first one might be a little bit uncomfortable. **How have I allowed myself to be easily offended by Jesus and his church?**

Has your faith not grown because you haven't pushed through being offended? Maybe it is something that Jesus taught about your behavior presently or in the past. He wasn't modern enough and so you were

offended and decided to not push through and really trust him. **Maybe he told you something you were doing, a behavior and attitude was wrong and you didn't like it. Maybe he used his word or maybe he used someone in his church. Maybe he told you a relationship you were in or wanted to be in was wrong and not what he wanted for you and you were offended. Maybe he told you "things" weren't going to make you happy and you were offended and pursued them anyway. Maybe you just can't follow any leader that doesn't do what you think they should do. You might have not gotten what you wanted from his church and you were offended.**

Go back to that point and I'll tell you that you were at the point of a breakthrough in your faith. Trust him and push through and your faith can grow into something like James, Simon, and Juda's faith did.

I have been way too easily offended by people. The thing that has saved me is that I absolutely believe that Jesus has called me to do this. That's why I can't quit. My job is to help lead us through discomfort and being offended by not always getting what we want. Leadership is making people uncomfortable at a level that they can tolerate. Can you tolerate a season where we become one church with Beaverton and then focus a lot of energy on launching them back into a new season of ministry as Eagle Ridge Church of God, Beaverton campus.

What is my role, what do I bring to the team? What you can do about this is to take the **Come and See Class and have a **conversation with Tammy, our director of mobilization**. She is here to help you find your role by helping you find your calling.**

Maybe this week you will fast and pray about something that will not directly benefit you.

We need ordinary people who don't need the spotlight, who have passion and who want everyone to know Jesus.