

Have you ever submitted an application? A college application? A job application? Any application? Then you know how tough it can be.

For college, there's your GPA, and your extracurriculars, and then your character too. And for jobs, there's your education, your experience, your personal gifts and abilities, your background check, your handshake and smile and interview skills. Very few of us can get into whatever college we want, and even fewer of us can land any job we want. It's all about credentials, credentials, credentials!

But what about applying to be a disciple? Would that be easy or hard to make the cut? You'd think, judging by God's standards, that it would be darn near impossible. So, are you as stunned as I am after hearing the Gospel reading this morning?

I mean, what's with Jesus today? Here's His official job ad for disciple.

JOB REQUIREMENTS: Faithful, loyal, committed follower, willing to labor indefinitely in the Lord's harvest.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS: Ability to preach the Gospel, heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead.

And just look who Jesus chooses. Impulsive, headstrong, denying Peter; James and John, two brothers who think of no one but themselves and their greatness in the kingdom; Doubting Thomas; Matthew the tax collector; Simon the rebel, the Zealot; and Betraying Judas—need I go on? These guys don't exactly match the description. They're supposed to represent Jesus, go on His behalf, but just look at them!

Well, here's something—do you like war movies? If you do, then maybe you've seen "The Dirty Dozen." It's about a special military operation back in WWII. There's this one American officer—played by Lee Marvin—and he's given a special mission to free some American prisoners from the Nazis. And in order for him to do this one assignment he must choose the best guys for the job. Here's the thing though—the best guys for the job aren't exactly the best guys for the job. What I mean is, there's a 90% chance that this mission will fail, so the Army doesn't want to put any of its really good soldiers at risk.

So instead, what Lee Marvin has to do is go to the American prison and recruit men from there. He has his pick alright, plenty of bad soldiers—thieves, murderers, scoundrels—men who've messed up big time and now find themselves in trouble with the military justice system. It's from this motley assortment that he has to choose for his special mission. It's the worst guys for the job who end up being the best guys for the job.

And as the movie unfolds, as we watch these twelve chosen men fulfill their mission, we come to find this out for ourselves. For one thing, many of the "dirty dozen" have important skills acquired from their criminal careers that now prove useful for this risky mission. One of them, for example, picks locks, which is helpful at the prison. Another knows how to throw a punch, which also comes in handy. And being crooks, they're all pretty good at lying, concealing, and being sneaky. Thanks to their unconventional talents, they're way better at getting the job done than could any of the really good and honest soldiers. All of these guys, who the world would see as rather inept and downright worthless, all have a chance at becoming heroes. Could that maybe be what Jesus is up to here?

I mean, sure, Jesus could've chosen the best and the brightest, the righteous and holy, but would they have had what it takes? Just imagine, for a moment, the Pharisees or the Priests and Levites going to the brothels, the leper colonies, or the local jails—how would that go? How else would regular folks be reached if one of their own didn't reach out to

them? The goody two-shoes of that society would never go, *could* never go. No, that's why His "dirty dozen"—scruffy fishermen and lousy tax collectors; just regular folks—were the right men for the job.

But maybe Jesus also chose them for another reason. Jesus sends them out not on their own authority, but with His. Here, Christ came, putting the world to rights, and then He tells His dozen disciples to go and do the same. If they seemed like the natural choice—strong, capable, virtuous—then it might look like *they* should get the credit. People would see what they were doing and put faith in *them* and *their* powers. But, instead, watching miracles come from *these guys* everyone's left wondering, how can this be? All they can conclude is that it must not be anything special *in them*, but rather Someone special working *through* them. Soli Deo Gloria!

But perhaps there's one other thing we're forgetting. Jesus Himself was all wrong for the job. After all, no self-respecting God would consider squeezing Himself into a man-suit like that. No heavenly King in their right mind would climb down the social ladder to be born in a stable. No other Lord of power and might would ever in a million years allow Himself to be nailed to a cross. Jesus had no army, no great fortune, no place to lay His head even—He was unqualified in every way.

Yet, He was the just the guy—the only possible guy—who could carry out God's special rescue mission. Without Jesus doing what He did, guilt would've never been lifted and death wouldn't have ever died. But because Jesus did take on His mission, you and I and our whole world have been rescued—we are now forgiven and free and forever.

Will Willimon, the former United Methodist Bishop of Alabama, has this to say. "I know a woman who was called to be a disciple. She'd spent most of her life raising a family. One day she looked up and her family was gone. There was no longer anybody there who needed her. Did her life have any more meaning, [she wondered]? Had she lost all of her significance as a human being?"

"She presented herself at her church, asking to be given something to do. She said to me," [Willimon recounts], 'Unfortunately, I haven't had any real work experience. I'm afraid there is not much that I could be useful for in the church.' She was wrong. As a mother of four children, she had wonderful organizational skills. Those skills were used to organize the church's first Habitat for Humanity work team. She was good at organizing people, getting people to make commitments, and following up on their commitments. These skills, learned as a mother, proved to be marvelously useful to the church in its business of proclaiming and enacting the gospel."

This morning, Jesus turns to you, calls you, to join His "dirty dozen." He makes you disciple #13, a "dirty baker's dozen." Oh, I know what you're thinking—who am I? I'm not qualified to fix a broken world! I'm without the credentials to go out there and turn this place around! I don't have what it takes to make much of a difference! But that's exactly what makes you perfect for the job! The skill set you lack, actually equips you with everything you need.

See, it's only by God's grace, that He chooses you! This way, you'll fall back on Him rather than rely on yourself. You'll go boldly on His authority, not trusting in your own. And people will be pointed to God, rather than looking to you.

But maybe there's another reason Jesus picks you out to continue His mission on earth. Maybe what He sees needs doing in the world requires someone like you, somebody with the sorta worldly wisdom you have. Maybe Jesus thinks you're just right because He can take your experiences at work, or at school, or at raising a family, and use them to reach those who might not be reached otherwise. Maybe He thinks *who better* to go?

So, won't you join His mission? Won't you answer His call? It's a chance not just to transform the world, but for you to never be the same either. It means that everything you do, wherever you are, is important, special, holy work. Whatever it is, now has inherent meaning, is full of purpose, is of eternal significance!

06.18.2017
Second Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 9:35-10:8

Rev. David V. Miller
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Not to mention, I've always wanted to do some miracles, haven't you? Well, by sharing Christ, and caring for others in His name, you are! After all, the way it usually works in this life is by Murphy's Law, so anything different is nothing short of miraculous! Yes, you are helping to make things go, keeping people healthy and happy, making this dying world bud with life and sprout with joy. Kinda sounds like healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead, doesn't it! So, don't you want to join in the fun?

Now, don't ever wonder again, "Who am I?" Because thanks to Jesus—who calls, renews, and inspires—who *aren't* you?"