

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew 9:25 - 10:8.

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

This ends the reading from the Gospel of Matthew. Thanks be to God.

I read a letter the other day. It's out on the internet. I've seen it before. I think it's been around the block a couple of times, so maybe you have heard it or read it yourself. The letter is addressed:

Dear Jesus, Son of Joseph

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests. We have not only run the results through our computer, but we have also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and our vocational aptitude consultant.

The profiles of all tests are included. You will want to study each of them carefully. As part of our service, we make some general observations. These come without any additional fee.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, educational and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue to search for persons of experience and proven capacity in management.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and is given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by

the Greater Galilee Better Business Bureau. James the-son-of-Alphaeus and Thaddaeus have radical leanings and registered high manic-depressive scores.

Only one candidate shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness who meets people well and has a keen business mind. He has contacts in high places and is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Signed, Galilee Management Consulting Firm

When Jesus picks his twelve disciples, sending them out to preach and to do the very same things he had been doing – you know, all of that healing and teaching and feeding and giving – well, Matthew completely fails to tell us of any special qualifications they have. You would think Matthew might have mentioned that Jesus chose these particular people because of their prior experience, or their great potential, or their unusual spiritual insight. We're told none of that, however. We're given their names and nothing more.

So, for all intents and purposes, these first disciples were an unqualified bunch if ever there was one. Of course, it's still true today, isn't it? Which one of us is really suited, on the basis of experience or ability, to carry out this work of the church, this mission of love? Who among us feels qualified to heal a broken world in Jesus name? Do you feel qualified?

This whole notion of having faith and being a Christian cause to us step outside our comfort zone on a regular basis. The world is not just about me, me, me; nor is it even just about my family or my job or my stuff. This whole thing of being a Christian is about this broken world and giving love. But that's not easy.

One of the greatest barriers to moving outside your comfort zone is the fear that you're an imposter, that you're not worthy, that you couldn't possibly be qualified to do whatever you've set your sights to do. It's a fear that strikes many of us: the impostor syndrome. In fact, I dare say, all of us suffer from the impostor syndrome at one time or another. And, on some level, we are indeed completely and irrevocably unqualified to be a Christian in this world.

I know I've certainly had those thoughts while serving as pastor in this church or even and maybe especially thirty years ago when I was serving in my very first church. I may appear confident on the outside but deep down inside I feel incredibly insecure. Who I am to be stepping into this pulpit? What could I possibly have to say that anyone would want to hear? What if everyone finds out that I am no more special than anybody else and I actually have no secret knowledge or special access to God that isn't also available to everyone else?

Now I know I'm not alone. Actress Natalie Portman described the self-doubt she experienced as a Harvard University student several years ago. She said, "I felt like there had been some mistake," she said, "that I wasn't smart enough to be in this company, and that every time I opened my mouth I would have to prove that I wasn't just a dumb actress."

Or take, Howard Schultz, the chair, president, and CEO of Starbucks revealed that he, and CEOs he knows, feel the same way: "Very few people, whether you've been in that job before or not, get into

the seat and believe today that they are now qualified to be the CEO. They're not going to tell you that, but it's true."

I think this is what Jesus is getting at – when you follow Jesus, you are going to be in situations that are outside your comfort zone; even after a lifetime of experience, there will be days when you feel like a novice, a beginner, an unqualified ordinary person with no super powers to do this work.

I think that's the whole point. You have to be vulnerable in order to lead. You have to risk yourself in order to be an example. You have to live with an open heart in order to give and receive love. This is not by accident. This is intentional.

All of us imposters, all of us unqualified disciples trying to follow the way of Jesus. This truth not only keeps us humble but also liberates us, frees us.

If you think about for a minute, there are definite benefits for being an unqualified disciple, a novice. There is a freedom in never having done this before. You get to ask all the questions you want. You get to try something once or twice and then try something else. You are not burdened by conventional wisdom or the ever-present "we've always done it that way." New inventions, new ideas, and new ways of being church come from embracing the novice inside of you. When you haven't done it before, you get to set the tone and create a new path. And that is liberating.

Being an unqualified disciple creates failures one after the other. I love a good failure. I mean, I don't feel good about my failures. I get pretty bummed and disappointed and sometimes I get angry or hurt and I can certainly cry about some of my failures. But, get this, I also get to learn. I get to find out something I never knew before and I get to learn it up close and in person.

My failed cooking experiments lead me to great lessons of gratitude for the gift of those who can cook and feed other people. I have learned the very, very important difference between 1 teaspoon and 1 tablespoon. That really matters in a recipe. Very important.

My failed sermons become an opportunity for thinkers like you to unravel the mysteries of your faith and who you believe God is. There is also the possibility that, even if I give myself a failed grade on a sermon, there is the possibility that God has still done something during worship – a song, a word, a prayer, an idea, an image, a metaphor, a handshake, or even a benediction. Worship is for the community. Worship is about God and our connection to God. And that will happen regardless of the elegance or wittiness of any particular sermon I might write or deliver.

Being an unqualified disciple gives you great perspective. Even empathy. Look at the world through the eyes of a child or your grandchild. See it for the first time. Put yourself in someone else's shoes. If you think that maybe you don't belong here in church because you are flawed and broken, think how much harder it must be for someone who has never been to church to walk in these doors.

Rather than focus on all of the things that you lack, all of the reasons you can't do something or all of the ways that you are the wrong person for the job, I want you to pause. Pause and realize that each and every one of us broken and flawed. None of us is perfect. We are just broken in different ways. But we are all in the same boat.

Jesus chose those first twelve people not because of great skills or wealth or power. I believe Jesus chose those first twelve precisely because they are ordinary folks, like us. We may not be qualified

but God calls us God's beloved child. And Jesus looks around and sees that we are the ideal choice for finding the lost sheep, curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, casting out demons. We are the ideal choice precisely because we know what it means to be lost, to be sick, to be dead inside, to be possessed by an obsession that won't let us go.

This doesn't take special or magical powers. This takes heart and love. This takes perseverance and tenacity. This takes vulnerability and risk. This takes you, being yourself, doing your part and learning about all the rest.

At the Tony Award Show last Sunday night, we watched as Ben Platt received the Tony for an Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical for "Dear Evan Hansen." At 23 years old – just five years out of high school -- Ben has become a show-stopping star. Yet, in his acceptance speech, he said:

"To the young people out there tonight, do not waste your time being anything but yourself. Because the things that make you strange are the things that make you powerful."

Or as Marianne Williamson has famously written:

We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Unqualified? Absolutely. Feeling like an imposter? Most of the time. Doing it anyway? Yes, yes and yes. Bloom. Bloom right where you are planted that others might bloom along with you. Amen.