

These are the names of the twelve apostles...Simon aka Peter, Andrew, James, John; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew, James, and Thaddaeus; Simon, and Judas Iscariot. In the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Hi,” I said to the two young girls, balancing on the porch railing of the house next door. “Hi, hello, what’s your name?” the older of the two asked me. I responded, “my name’s Martha, what’s yours?” I have to admit, I still don’t know the names of my new neighbors-not because I don’t want to, but because I couldn’t understand what they were telling me; their names not as simple to pronounce as Jane or John. After three tries, I decided it was best to remain on friendly terms, not calling them by name, but acknowledging them and their brother with a wave, a smile, and a question about what’s keeping them occupied.

We hear in today’s Gospel when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus summons the 12, his motley crew of Apostles-messengers and ambassadors- to help him in the proclamation of the Good News, to heal and to restore. We know little of Andrew, Bartholomew, or Thaddeus. There’s James, son of Alphaeus, known as James the lesser, and Philip, who hails from the same town as Peter and Andrew. Impulsive, reactive, foot-in-his mouth Peter, “Doubting” Thomas, the Zebedee brothers, James and John, who sometimes appear a bit persnickety, feeling superior to the rest, Matthew, a despised tax collector, Simon the zealot-perhaps a freedom fighter personality or a terrorist, depending on your which position you take, and the eventual betrayer, Judas Iscariot. The 12 are given work to do, a mission to proclaim the good news. There is more here to examine, in this “training mission” but that’s for another homily.

You and I belong to a motley crew, too; fallible, fragile, imperfect human beings, children of God, and called by name. Each with a gift, and given a charge, as Jesus Followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to continue the work that was begun a long time ago. Our work, our challenge over the past several months has likely been our most difficult yet. The fabric of our life and lifestyle seems to be raveling and tearing apart. The COVID19 pandemic continues to infect and disrupt life as we knew it. The brutal murders of Breonna, Ahmad, Sean, George, and most recently the killing of Rayshard, have brought many in our country (and others around the world) to the realization that the Civil Rights Movement that lasted two decades resulted in small, almost inconsequential changes for persons of color. Racism, white privilege and inequality exist still in large measure-though as Pastor Randi commented last week, most of us are not directly to blame.

Still, we’ve been entrusted with a sacred task -to ask questions more difficult than what’s your name (though that’s a good start)-to begin to understand issues like grief, fear, powerlessness, mistrust, anger and frustration. After the questions are asked, we must LISTEN and HEAR, and ACKNOWLEDGE... the truths told by those whose ancestors were human cargo in slave ships, whose family members bore the marks of the whip and endured rape, those who experienced the violence of the KKK and police officers, those who have been excluded, passed over, or devalued based on the color of their skin or a name too uncommon and uncomfortable to

pronounce. We must honor the voices and concerns of the aged, but also the youth who give powerful witness for the changes that need to be made. As mystic Meister Eckhart teaches, "the purpose of a word is to reveal."

In the story of Genesis this is the phrase of creation, "Let there be..." Let there be... what? Love, forgiveness, repentance, amendment, understanding, peace, justice, mercy, equality, compassion. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The aftermath of violence is bitterness; the aftermath of non-violence is the creation of beloved community...redemption and reconciliation." Amen mjf-W/B 6-14-20