Invitation to the Table

In 1999, psychologists David Dunning and Justin Kruger identified a mental bias in which persons with limited knowledge or skill in a specific area **overestimate their abilities**, because they lack the skills to evaluate their own level of competence. Conversely, highly competent persons may **underestimate their skill**, assuming tasks that are easy for them are also easy for others.

We have economists—people who have spent their entire adult life and career studying global trade—warning us that certain tariff policies could trigger a recession, and they are being dismissed by people who've never taken an economics class.

We have biblical scholars—people who read the original languages and who have given their lives to understanding the Scripture in its historic context, and they are being lectured by leaders who discovered their biblical understanding and interpretive skills somewhere around an election cycle.

We have doctors, scientists, historians who are being challenged by people who have "done their own research."

It's all part of our confirmation culture, our cultural obsession with being absolutely, totally, infallibly right about everything—or more to the point: condemning everyone who disagrees.

But Jesus never counselled or rewarded certainty. He counselled "faith:" the willingness and the effort to live as if we truly believe what we say we believe. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the ones who know they don't have it all figured out; the ones who acknowledge that God is more than we can ever know or understand, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven… They've already arrived.

So we gather around a table, not because we are worthy or even understand what it all means, but simply because there's a party going on, and we're invited.

Our communion hymn is #392, "Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether".

Pastoral Prayer

Thanks be to you, our God, for Christ our Lord. On a cross death killed life, and yet life was conqueror; hatred killed love, but love lives on---and on, and on; evil killed goodness and goodness, wherever it appears, prevails. Fill our hearts today with the joy of his victory.

God who is beside us, and yet beyond all comprehension; God whose love touches us and changes us and yet is so hard to live; we believe. We don't understand; but we believe. Give us strength to walk with that—to accept that we don't understand and never will fully understand. Give us strength to walk in faith and to trust that you will be with us.

And grant us humility to accept that, even if others may not share our belief, they may be living in some part of you that we don't see. Grant us humility and grace to share but not to insist that others mirror us. Grant that we may be the glass through which others see you, even if only dimly.

And since we don't comprehend the fullness of your love, remind us to look to Jesus, in whom your fullness was pleased to dwell. Show us dreams of a better day, when all people live out your incomprehensible love—loving our neighbor as ourselves, loving our enemies, praying for those who despise us.

Remove any pride in us and replace it with the humility of Jesus, who is the one who shapes our belief. And grant us faith that what we believe is enough, for now; faith that enables us to forget about ourselves and live for others, following the example of Jesus, in whose name we pray and seek to live. Amen.

A Motley Crew

MATTHEW 10:2-7 (NRSVUE) *Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.* [2]*These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as 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 Cananaean and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.* [5]*These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not take a road leading to gentiles, and do not enter a Samaritan town,* [6]*but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* [7]*As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'*

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The Word of God for the people of God!

Last week at the table, Dean summarized the whole story from the 10th chapter of Matthew: Jesus sending out the twelve apostles, and he suggested there are several sermons in that narrative, and he's right. What caught my eye—and I went back to last week's reading and read the whole narrative—what caught my eye was the list of names—a Motley Crew to say the least!

Not the 80s heavy metal group with the funny spelling and the umlaut; and not the financial advice group Motley Fool, which took its name from Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It* that focuses on the one character—the court jester—who could speak the truth to the Duke without having his head lopped off.

In the 18th century, the term described the ragtag, unconventional sailors who made up the crew of a ship: diverse, mismatched, disorganized with very little in common and don't seem to belong together.

The twelve disciples are a most unlikely group, an unpredictable, ragtag band of ordinary, flawed individuals.

Working people: **Simon Peter** and his brother, **Andrew**, **James** and **John**, the sons of Zebedee; fishermen: rough, calloused hands, sunburned, leathery skin, rugged, impulsive, and uneducated and unpolished, these are not spiritual giants or intellectual crème de la crème; yet they formed Jesus' inner circle.

And when you consider some of the potential pairings…

Look at **Matthew** (sometimes known by his Hebrew name, **Levi**). He was a Publican—a tax collector. Despised by most Israelites, not just because he collected taxes, although… Hey, I've been audited three times. The issue with Publicans was that they were Jews who enriched themselves by working for the occupying Roman Empire. They had a quota, but they were free to collect any amount they wanted and imprison any who wouldn't or couldn't pay.

Would you pair him with **Simon the Zealot?** Zealots were radical political insurgents who worked—sometimes violently—for the liberation of Judah *from* Roman occupation. I'll bet Simon and Matthew had some interesting dinnertime conversations! And

can you imagine their exchanges on social media?

Talk about a "team of rivals!" I wonder how many of us cancel each other's votes at the polls? But Jesus called them both.

Or look at **James and John, Sons of Zebedee**. Jesus called them "Sons of Thunder," probably not for their father but for their mother, the prototypical stage mom. In Matthew 20, she comes to Jesus and asks: "Grant that one of my sons might sit at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom." Vice president and Secretary of State! Right there in front of all the other disciples. Awkward!

And yet, Along with Peter, James and John became part of Jesus' inner circle. They were the ones who witnessed the Transfiguration, the ones Jesus took to pray with him the night before he died.

Ambitious, in-your-face pushy, always up front and visible; would you team them up with **James, son of Alpheus**? Identified, not by who he was, not on his own terms, but only as his father's son. Aside from appearing on the list of disciples in all four gospels, we don't read about him in the New Testament. He'd totally disappear in the shadow of those Sons of Thunder. But Jesus called him, too.

Then there's **Simon Peter**. Bless his heart! Full of bluster… If James and John wanted to be Vice President and Secretary of State, I think Peter wanted to be the five-star-general, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Upon you will I build my church!" "Get behind me, Satan." "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Feed my sheep."

Hot and cold like a kitchen sink, completely gung-ho one minute, denying Jesus the next, would you send him out on a mission with **Nathanael** (the Synoptic Gospels call him **Bartholomew**, but they tell us nothing about him aside from the list of disciples)? In John, Nathanael is the group's cynic. When Philip tells him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael responds: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" And yet, Jesus said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" You gotta' love cynics. They can keep a group grounded in reality. Nathaneal offers a counterbalance to Peter's undependable emotionalism.

How about **Philip**, the one who told Nathaneal, "We found the one?" In the book of Acts, Philip shares the good news with a foreigner from Ethiopia. There was no hesitation or cynicism in Philip. From the beginning, Philip grasped the universal embrace of God's love.

Would you put him on a witness team with **Thomas**? Thomas gets some bad press and never lived down that moment of doubt on that first Easter evening. But Jesus called him, too.

And then there's **Andrew**. I feel a special connection with Andrew, since it's his

cross that hangs across the chalice in our church logo. Tradition says he was crucified spread-eagle on an X-shaped cross. Andrew is known as the first Evangelist. He was the first disciple Jesus called, and the first thing he did was go get his brother, Simon and said, "We have found the Messiah!"

And later it's Andrew who finds the boy with five loaves and two fish that feeds a huge crowd. Andrew is one of those behind-the-scenes guys who quietly makes things happen, the kind of person without whom the church would completely fall apart.

And there he is at the same table with **Judas Iscariot**, the one who was bought for 30 pieces of silver. Some say he was trying to force Jesus' hand. The disciples were always asking, when are we going to start the revolution? Maybe Judas was just trying to get Jesus off high center; but, what kind of strategy begins with betraying the one you most love and admire?

And, where would you put **Thaddeus** (Luke calls him **Judas the son of James**—the other Judas, but we know nothing about him except his name—or names. Any younger siblings here; like James, the son of Alpheus, always living in the shadows?

See what I mean? When it came to choosing folks to trust with the work of God's kingdom, Jesus took… well, he took just about anybody. Most of these guys had nothing in common, and yet, each disciple brought his own unique gifts and opinions and commitments, as well as his foibles and biases and flaws. But despite their differences, despite their rough edges and their humanness—or maybe *because of* those things—Jesus entrusted the task of sharing the good news of God's love to this motley crew.

So, what do you think? Would you have made it into the top twelve? It's a moot question. The real question is whether you're called today.

Are you a behind-the-scenes kind of person like Andrew? Good news! Jesus is calling you.

Do you like to share God's love with others, like Philip? Do you have mother issues like James and John? Do you run hot and cold with your faith like Peter? Do you sometimes struggle with doubt, like Thomas? Good news! Jesus is calling you.

Simon the Zealot was radically partisan; but, Democrat or Republican, hawk or dove, or even tax collector, good news! Jesus is calling you.

Are you a cynic? A naysayer? A pragmatist, like Nathanael? Do you sometimes feel nameless, invisible, like James, son of Alpheus, known more for who you're not than for who you are, like Judas-not-Iscariot? Good news! Jesus is calling you.

And, speaking of Judas Iscariot, have you ever done something unforgiveable, something that betrayed the person you most loved and admired? What's your price? Good news! Jesus is calling you.

Pray with me.