**APOSTLES OF JESUS**

Luke 6:12-49

Key Verse: 6:40

In Jesus’ day, people kept wine in bags of leather, called wineskins. Because of the gases wine emits, these wineskins worked perfectly to keep wine, because they would expand with gases and the wine. So, when you had new wine, you would always get a new wineskin to put the new wine into. Nobody would try to reuse an old wineskin that had wine in it before, because the already stretched out wineskin would burst, ruining the new wine. Everybody, if they wanted to get new wine, would put it into a new wineskin. We learned last week that Jesus taught that, when coming to God and his grace, we can’t try to reuse what we know or our own religious standards. We have to, in a way, begin again, be like new wineskins. Today’s passage is very much a continuation of this teaching of Jesus. Today’s passage is about, after receiving the wine of God’s grace, how it should stretch us.

There’s a famous sermon by Jesus called “The Sermon on the Mount” in the Gospel of Matthew. Today, we’re going to be looking at Luke’s account of this sermon, which is referred to as, “The Sermon on the Plain.” Luke’s account of this sermon has a different emphasis. More than the general crowd of people, this sermon is directed to his disciples, and is a guideline for them as to what kind of men he wanted them them to be. Again, this is Jesus sharing with them how God’s grace would stretch them. May we learn today what kind of people God wants to stretch us into.

**Apostles (12-16)**

Look at verse 12. This passage begins with a usual description of Jesus. It says he went up to a mountain to pray, and spent all night praying. Luke, of all the Gospel writers, shares with us how often Jesus prayed. It’s impossible to know what it was Jesus prayed on that mountain, and why especially this time he prayed all night long. But, when Jesus prayed all night, it’s usually when he had a very big decision to make (Luke 22:41-44). And look at verse 13. As day broke, the first thing Jesus does is call his disciples to him. I’m sure that’s not coincidence. Jesus prayer that night was for his disciples—spending time thinking about each of these men, their lives, giving thanks for their unique characteristics, but also praying for the struggles they each had. Look at 13. Jesus calls his disciples to come to where he was on the mountain, and of them he chooses twelve of them. This chooses of the twelve was a huge decision for Jesus. So who Jesus picked as “the twelve” a big choice, such a big one that he prayed all night long about it. There’s something to be learned here—big decisions in our lives, do we pray about them? Do we ask God for guidance?

So, who were these men that Jesus chose? Look at 14-16. We have two sets of brothers, Simon (who gets the new name Peter) and Andrew, James and John. These were blue-collar guys, fishermen from Galilee, and these two sets of brothers were also partners in their fishing business. Simon seems to be the oldest and boldest, Andrew a simple, hard-working guy, and James and John, brothers very driven to succeed. Philip, who was from the small town of Bethsaida, which was the same home town where Simon and Andrew were also from. We have Matthew, who used to be the socially despised tax collector Levi. Bartholomew, (also called Nathanael, cf. Jn1:45-51) had been told about Jesus from his friend Philip, and who Jesus describes as a very scholarly, pious and upright Jewish man. Then there’s Thomas, (a.k.a. Dydimus, meaning “twin”) which seems to be a nickname for him, meaning he had a twin, and is described in the gospels as a pragmatist. There’s James, the son of Alpheus, who we don’t know much about, but he could very well be the brother of Levi, whose father was also named Alpheus. There’s another guy named Simon, who was a Zealot, meaning he had been a part of the Jewish political movement of the time, which was essentially an anarchist group against Roman occupation. There’s Judas, the son of James, who also went by the name Thaddeus, who seems to a quiet kind of guy, cause we hear very little about him. And then there’s Judas Iscariot, the only one of the group who was not from the northern rural region of Galilee, who was the treasurer of the group, and who would go on to betray Jesus.

These men, Jesus chose as the twelve. We have brothers, friends, anarchists, outcasts, religious men and sinful men, thoughtful and complex men, simple men, men who shared their opinions very freely and often, and men who were very quiet. You can’t but help notice the variety of guys here. Why these men, why such a variety, and for what? The answer to this comes from he now calls them. Let’s look again at verse 13. He appoints them as apostles. This word, apostle, means to be “sent out.” Jesus chose these men to send them out. After Jesus was gone, just as varied and different as these men were, they would go out to very different countries, to different kinds of people people—one would go to Egypt, another to India, another to Greece. And they would go out proclaiming that there was this Good News of forgiveness, which they called the Gospel. And these different men, with this message, would go on to literally change the world for all time.

Imagine you were one of the twelve that morning. Jesus calls you up to the mountain and picks you and says, “I appoint you as an apostle.” I don’t think the disciples really understood what this meant at this point. They were probably like, “Nice, we get to be apostles!” But then somebody probably whispered, “Pshh, what’s an apostle?” They were just regular guys who started following this amazing man Jesus. Being sent out as apostles, what’s that about?

Have you ever been asked, “How do you spiritually identify yourself?” It can be an awkward question to answer to someone you just meet. It’s almost taboo for some. Many of us here would probably say we identified ourselves as a Christian. But has anybody ever answered that question by saying, “I’m an apostle”? Being an apostle is not something we often think about. These guys were just trying to follow Jesus, liked being around him, and tried to learn from him. But being an “apostle”?

Being apostles wasn’t something these men conjured up, it was Jesus. We may think, “Good for them! Those guys were great apostles!” But this appointment of apostleship is not limited to these twelve men alone. **Jesus has this same hope for anyone who follows him—that once we start following him he wants to send us out as apostles.**

If you’re a Christian, if you’ve been following Jesus, if you’ve come to know God’s grace, then this being an apostle, being sent out, is the full reaction to the message of the Gospel. Not only do we come to receive it, but it fills us, transforms us, and compels every part of our lives. It’s hard to believe though, “I’m an apostle? That’s only for like, holy people right?” It’s for everyone who comes to know God’s grace. If you know God’s grace, you’re an apostle of it. Like Newton’s Third Law of Motion—for every action, there is an opposite and equal reaction. The action is if we receive the Gospel, the reaction is that the Gospel transforms us and sends us out to live a different kind of life of an apostle.

What does the life an apostle look like? The rest of this passage is Jesus’ explanation of what it means to live as an apostle of Jesus and the Gospel.

**True Happiness (17-26)**

Look at verses 17- 19. Jesus comes down the mountain with his disciples to a level place. There were the rest of his followers, and what’s described as a great crowd; people form all over. They were all there waiting for Jesus. It says that they wanted to hear him and also to be healed. And look at verse 19. This crowd was all coming to Jesus and trying to touch him, because, “power was coming form him and healing them all.” Now, this must’ve been a spectacular sight. This crowd of people were being healed by this unseen power coming from Jesus!

And as this is happening, what does Jesus do? Look at verse 20a. Jesus looks at his disciples, which seems a little odd. And then, he begins to speak to them. It’s clear that what Jesus is about to say is directed to them, his newly appointed apostles.

Look at verses 20-26. Jesus begins with what has come to be known as the beatitudes, which in Latin means, “happiness.” If you look at verses 20-22, each of these first sayings begin with the word, “blessed.” In English, this word usually means “fortunate.” But, the original Greek word is, is *mak-ar’-ee-os*, which literally means, “supreme bliss.” So, while the crowd is being healed by Jesus, he wants to talk to his newly appointed apostles about true happiness.

What is true happiness? How would you define it? Let’s look at Jesus’ words here to his disciples in verses 20-22. Jesus says his that his disciples would be truly happy if they are poor, hungry, sorrowful, and hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected as evil. What? Excuse me? Does that sound like true happiness to you? That sounds horrible! That sounds like everything people try to get away from to find true happiness. What is Jesus saying? This word for poor, is translated as “poor in spirit,” which means humble. So true happiness comes from humility. Next is “happy are the hungry.” I don’t know about you, but I’m not too happy when I’m hungry. In Matthew’s account, it says happy are those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness,” (righteousness meaning a right state with God). So, true happiness comes from a hunger to be with God. And then there’s weeping. This certainly isn’t just “happy are those who cry a lot” kind of thing. Jesus is saying that, when there is cause to mourn, which happens in life, they can be truly happy, because as he says, “for you will laugh.” So, Jesus is saying true happiness can happen even when there are situations where we’re faced with sad now, because of the promise that there will be laughter. But does that mean? Verse 23a helps us understand. Jesus says, “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.” Jesus is saying that they can be truly happy, no matter what is happening, because they would know that they would be laughing forever in heaven. Now let’s look at verse 22. Jesus says that they can be truly happy even when people completely hated and despised them, because they would be, “of the Son of Man.” People would see the apostles and they would see Jesus, they would see his qualities, and his character, and they would be treated horribly because of it. But in those times, Jesus is saying, is true happiness because it would be a sign that they were being like him. This seems to be crucial to their happiness as apostles. All this stuff would happen to them, yet they would be considered of the Son of Man. Being like Jesus, of the Son of Man, is true happiness.

Jesus’ definition of happiness is completely different from what we normally think. Looking at verses 24-26. Jesus parallels these statements, by saying “Woe, which means “grief,” or, “sorrow,” or simply, “unhappiness.” “Unhappy are who live for money, food, laughter, and people adoration.” How can this be true? We define happiness today has, having enough money, having enough food, having a few laughs, and having friends who like you. What more can you ask for? Sounds like a happy life. I don’t think Jesus is saying that these things themselves are necessarily bad, but it’s when our happiness depends on them that we are not happy. And Jesus is essentially telling them that they can be truly happy even if they had none of these things.

Rather, true happiness, Jesus is saying, is not based on what you have or don’t have. We can “leap for joy” in the worst of situations for two main reasons from these verses—we get to be in a relationship with, and of the character of the Son of Man (22b), and we have the promise of eternity with him in his kingdom (23a). And what this source of happiness is is essentially the Gospel—the good news that we get to be with Jesus, we get to be like him, we get to be with God forever. And when the truth of the gospel sinks in, and we believe it, it changes us. We are content.

Have you ever met someone like this? Someone who has no money, no food, has hard things happening to them, is hated by everyone, and who is still truly happy? About a year and a half ago, when I went to Nigeria, I met a man named Peter. This man left his country, to go and live permanently in probably one of *the* toughest cities to live in—Lagos, extreme corruption, poverty, and crime. David and I stayed at this guy’s house. He and his wife were extremely poor. The electricity would go out a couple times a day. His house had been robbed several times. He had to send his kids to a different country to go to decent school. He was hated and despised as a foreigner by many there. Peter had even been imprisoned a couple times, failed at several business ideas he started, and he welcomed so many college students to come and live with him, and many used him for the convenience. Sounds like a miserable life. But, what was crazy about Peter was that he was always smiling, always cracking jokes, always optimistic, always thankful. He was genuinely happy. In the early morning, I could hear the guy singing hymns by himself. I remember asking myself, “How is this guy so frickin happy?” I think he got what Jesus is saying to his apostles. Peter knows he gets to be with Jesus, he gets to show Jesus through his life, and he gets to be with him forever, and because of this, he’s happy. This Gospel. And this is what makes us truly happy.

What are you going after to pursue happiness? Money, success, friends? Is it working? Are you happy? When the Gospel—the grace of Jesus and the hope of eternal life—becomes the core of happiness, then not only are we completely content, but we automatically become apostles. We stand out. We display a joy that can’t be found anywhere else, a happiness that doesn’t really make sense by human standards. We become those, “of the Son of Man” (22b).

**True Love (27-36)**

In the movie, *Princess’ Bride*, this poor farm boy falls in love with this princess, and she falls in love with him. But, him being a nobody, and her being somebody, they could never be together, and the princess moves away. But this guy is determined to be with her. He becomes somebody, goes through all this trouble to be with her, fights a giant, goes through a dangerous swamp, and is tortured and left for dead, just to be with the woman he loved. There’s this this doctor who can save the guy, but before saving him, the doctor asks him what it was that he wants to live for. And, this almost dead guy, uses all the strength he has left, to barely say, “True love.”

Who doesn’t like true love? People doing whatever it takes for somebody they love, is always beautiful. But is that *true* love?

Jesus here defines the fullness of true love. Look at verses 27-30. “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.’” These are some of the most beautiful yet challenging words of Jesus. See, loving a prince, or a princess, or someone who loves you back is one thing. Loving even your friends who maybe like you, we think, is kind of an accomplishment (32-34). But Jesus says that’s really nothing special, and goes on to say, “Even sinners do that.” But here, Jesus says to his apostles, who he is sending out, that he wants how they love to stretch them, to even “Love your enemies.”

This is true love. Love that can even love people who will not love us back. Jesus really sets the bar for his apostles high. And he gives examples—loving people who are mean, who ridicule, who steel, who hurt us, without any comfort to us. Usually, we act in love towards someone when we’re feeling it, when they’re nice, or we’re in a good mood. But to love in the way Jesus is describing, is to love not only when we feel like it, or when it’s easy, or when it’s fun. Love, as Jesus is describing it, is really a stubbornness, a reoccurring decision—that no matter how people respond we do good to others, we bless others, we pray for others, we share and give and lend our stuff to people, and we do all this with no strings attached and no expectations. We truly love when we love limitlessly.

How can we love this way? Let’s read verses 35-36. “But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” We can love this way when we know God’s love for us. As sinners, separated from him, we were his enemies. We were unthankful, unaware of him, expecting of him. We took and we complained and we threw his love in his face. But he still loved. Later on in Luke, we’re shown God as Jesus on the cross, who says as he’s being killed by people who he only tried to love—“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Jesus showed God’s heart on the cross—that is not conditional on the kind of person they are, whether or not they will love him back, whether or not they deserve it. It is a forgiving love. **If we believe that God loves us, that he forgives and forgets everything we did and will do, and welcomes us as we are, then, more than emotions or how easy it is, if we allow his love to stretch us, how we love others begins with this truth of God’s love for us.**

And, when we love this way, we are Jesus’ apostles. We reveal God’s forgiving love. We reveal the character of Jesus. Apostle Paul was like this. He was literally, an enemy of God. He was essentially finding Christians and having them put to death. But then he experienced Jesus, we met him, who accepted him even though he was an enemy, and who forgave him. This changed Paul, and he went around the world, loving people. People through rocks at him, put him in prison, but he forgave and he loved even his enemies. To truly love is to forgive.

Does your love for others stop with just people you understand, to your friends? Are you willing to love people who are different from you? Are you will to love and sacrifice even when people hate you, and despise you? When we do, God’s forgiving love is revealed.

**True Acceptance (37,38,41,42)**

Jesus goes on to talk about judging others, which is the opposite of love and forgiveness. He simply commands, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” He goes on to famously say, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” Jesus is basically saying how ridiculous it is for us to try and judge or criticize others. Imagine a man with a plank, like a big piece of wood, in his eye, worried about someone with a speck of sawdust in their eye? Before we even try to criticize others, Jesus teaches that first, we have to stop ignoring our own life threatening issues, and have our own planks removed. Then, Jesus says we can see clearly to try and help someone else remove the speck from their eyes.

It’s very easy to criticize others. It’s something we all do. Some people call it “reading”—looking at someone, what they’re wearing, how they’re talking, we size them up how pretty, smart, and accomplished people they are, we do this all the time. And, let’s be real, we tend to do this so much more to each other in this church community, maybe even more than people who aren’t a part of it. We look at each other and criticize—“You’re wearing that to church? Why were you so late? You are so lazy. You think you’re so talented. You think everyone likes you, they don’t. Oh, look at how much that person wants attention. That person just eats all the time and brings nothing… so selfish….” It’s like we’re looking for something wrong in others. Why? Because it makes us feel better about the huge plank sticking out of our own heads that we would like to ignore.

So how can we get over criticizing and judging one another? We have to come to realize that God, who actually has the right to judge us, and who sees every flaw, accepts us as we are. Even though we may have our own huge issues that we haven’t even fully dealt with yet, God still accepts us and forgives us. So when we look at others, although it’s easy to criticize, Jesus teaches that as his apostles, we should be accepting of people as they are.

Our community here, Lincoln Park UBF. Let’s be honest. Are we judging each other? Older people judging younger, younger people judging older, roommates, friends, new people and people who’ve been around for a while, are we looking at things to find in others to criticize to make ourselves feel better about ourselves? Let’s read verses 41-42. Before trying to look at others, we need to be aware of the planks in our own eyes, and ask God to remove them, and of our own eyes, and come to him with our own issues and stepping into his forgiveness and acceptance. Then, we can understand and accept one another. And again, when we do this, we’re apostles. We show people a community that is accepting and non-judgmental, and we create a place that welcomes any kind of person.

Are you judging others? Or, in an awareness of God’s acceptance of you, are you accepting?

**Fully Trained (39-40, 43-49)**

Now, the bar that Jesus sets for his apostles is pretty high. How can we hope to have this true happiness, true love, and true acceptance of others? Let’s read verse 40. “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.” Jesus here says that to be an apostle like this, we should be fully trained.

Fully trained? What? Ew. Why? Jesus explains why this training is necessary in verses 43-45. He says a good tree bearing good fruit is like a person who has good in their heart, and that person bears good things. For us to be truly happy, truly loving, and truly accepting, it isn’t psyching ourselves into it, or acting or putting ourselves into performance mode. This behavior that Jesus asks of us isn’t acting, it comes from what’s within. And for this inner change to happen, requires training. It’s like the stretching of new wineskins.

So, what kind of training do we need to undertake to have the character of an apostle of Jesus? Jesus explains in verses 46-49. He asks, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” Then he says. “As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like.” Jesus goes on to explain that someone who listens, tries to understand, and practice his words are like a man who builds a house. The man, “dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock.” The training is this, listening to, and putting into practice Jesus’ words. That’s the training to become like this. This digging down deep is like accepting and practicing God’s words deep within us. And then Jesus explains, when we do the tough, sometimes hard work of getting honest, of digging up rocks and dirt, and laying down a foundation, we can then build a house, that even when storms come, the house will not be destroyed.

No one likes the word “training.” But, think of it: have you ever stepped out of the shower, or just noticed some day, “man I’ve got some chub.” And then, when we notice that, we start dieting, we go running, we watch our calories, because we want to look good and feel better. And if you wanted to do something like run a marathon, and if you haven’t worked out or trained or eaten right, you’ll end up in the hospital. They say that’s when ER’s are the most busy, because so many people think they can do something like run a marathon, yet they don’t really train for it.

What if there was a mirror that was like a 360 mirror for our spiritual selves? And if we stepped into that mirror honestly, naked, what would we see? After living a life away from God, we looked for happiness in money, success, friends, we maybe tried to love people when it felt good, and we went around judging people so that we felt better about our own flaws. And spiritually, we got some chub, we became unhealthy, even obese. On top of that, the issues of our childhoods, the planks in our eyes of our own sins and mistakes, spiritually, we don’t just have some chub, but we’re sick, we’re diseased, we’re weak and unable to move. **But the beautiful part of what Jesus is saying here is that not only does God accept us in his grace, when we listen to and practice his words, he wants to transform us into apostles.** **We become vessels, wineskins of his grace.** He wants to train us to be spiritually healthy and active people. Like any training, this coming to Jesus’ words, listening to them, putting them into practice, this has to be a daily thing. It’s both the healthy nourishment for our spiritual bodies, and the sometimes tough but rewarding exercise we need when it pushes us.

Look at 46. Then he says. “As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like.” And what kind of person will we become? And look at the end of verse 40. We become like Jesus. That’s what Jesus says; we can be like him.

**Jesus trains us into his apostles when we live lives listening to and practicing God’s words.** Then, from the heart springs true happiness, true love, and true acceptance. When we live listening to and accepting Jesus’ words, he transforms us into his apostles.