

Jesus call for us to “be prepared” stands out to me from today’s gospel.

It’s a call for us to be prepared in the midst of a world that is ever changing and ever shifting around us.

It’s also a call for us to be prepared to be sent out as Christ’s disciples – into the very same world - sharing the peace, grace, and just hope of God where ever we go.

Yet, as we think about preparing for this ministry to which we have been called - we quickly begin to realize that for Jesus, being prepared seems to take on a whole new meaning then we might have thought.

After all, this gospel doesn’t tell us to pack an extra pair of socks, or even check the weather report before we go out. We don’t even need to prove we have an understanding of the inner workings of the trinity before we start this new and exciting journey with God.

We are simply called just as we are - to be sent out as God’s beloved within the world.

This was after all how Jesus had called his disciples to follow him at the start – telling them to drop their nets, leave their lives, and follow him. There was no skill testing question. Simply an open invitation that led a ragtag group of the least likely people to witness the glorious in-breaking of God’s kin-dom.

And just in case we forgot just how unlikely some of these early disciples of Jesus truly were – the author leaves us with a short list in the gospel lesson this morning as a reminder.

First there was Simon who later became known as Peter. A fisherman by trade. A leader in the pack who cracked under pressure and denied Jesus three times. He also had a case of foot in mouth disease, often saying the wrong thing at the wrong time - all the while dragging his kid brother Andrew along to take part.

Then there was James and John - who would have each easily qualified for anger management class on their own account. Hot headed and ambitious - they wanted to sit at the head table at the future banquet. Not the meek and mild persons we often would expect to be disciples.

We can’t forget about Matthew the tax collector for whom this gospel was named. A man who was always looking to make an extra buck in the midst of their adventures. Who would often clash with Simon the Zealot who had his own political and religious ideals that would isolated him in his judgement.

There were the women who became central figures in the proclamation of the gospel: Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene. Women who supported Jesus throughout his ministry and were the first to proclaim his rising from the grave. Without whom our Easter celebrations would never have been the same!

And then there was Thomas the doubter – who was always left wanting more proof. He was the natural born skeptic of the group who questioned Jesus right up to the end. As well as Judas who would come to betray both Jesus and his fellow disciples for 30 pieces of silver.

Leaving us with Bartholomew, Thaddeus, Philip, and James to round out this unlikely crew – it is safe to say that this was far from the dream team Jesus could have assembled if he really wanted to.

Yet, He purposely chose these ordinary imperfect people – telling them they were exactly who he had prepared to share God’s healing and redeeming love within the world.

However, this isn’t something we are used to hearing today. In fact, it’s starkly different from the messages we have come to receive. More often than not we are reminded of all the ways we don’t quite measure up.

We are told we’re not eloquent enough, or that we are far too young. We’re told we don’t have the right education, or that we need to be perfect in our allyship for it to mean anything. We are told that our bodies don’t fit the right mold or that our abilities don’t match up to the task at hand. We are told that our time has come and gone, leaving us to wonder if we still have anything left to give.

Yet – it’s into the midst of these messages that we hear Jesus call to us as his beloved disciples saying - I am preparing you to be sent out.

I am preparing you to say yes when the rest of the world tells you your answer should be no.

I am preparing you to leave behind the baggage of what you have always assumed being a true disciple of Christ must mean.

I am preparing you to be sent out – perhaps to the least likely of people or places to be God’s banner of hope.

I am preparing you to take a stand against the oppression and injustice of racism and discrimination – giving you the privilege to hold space for healing in God’s name.

I am preparing you – just the way you are to bring forward the good news of my love and forgiveness to the world.

Just as Jesus prepared his disciples to send them out all those years ago – Jesus prepares us to be sent out here and now.

In our baptism we have been named, claimed, and prepared for a life of discipleship rooted in the everlasting promises from God. Promises that tell us that God will go with us where ever we go. That we can trust in the forgiveness and grace of God to catch us when we fall. And

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promises that liberate us, to make known the love, grace and just hope of God with our varied gifts and experiences in the world.

God has prepared us to be present, able, and willing to walk alongside those within and outside of our community who may be in need. To stand up to the systemic demons of racism and white supremacy by speaking out against all the forces of oppression, hatred, and violence that keep us separated from being the whole people of God.

Perhaps now, more than ever, we need to trust that God has prepared us to respond to this very moment, through a lifetime of serving as Christ's beloved disciples.

So, go be sent out to share the good news of God's love and grace you have so freely received.

Go with God – trusting that you are prepared and called to this very moment for a world in need.

And may this be so among us - Amen.