

## **Pentecost 7/Lectionary 16B**

July 19, 2009

*Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ*

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Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalms 23

Ephesians 2:11-22

***Mark 6:30-34, 53-56***

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I'd like to start today with a quick survey... How many of you have heard the name Susan Boyle? Feel free to raise your hands – I'm not going to call on anybody.

Well, as I can see that most of you are already familiar with this lady, it's apparent that she's nowhere near the unknown she was only a few short months ago. When Susan Boyle first appeared on the stage of "Britain's Got Talent" on April 11<sup>th</sup>, the audience was obviously skeptical that this dowdy woman had any talent at all. And then she began to sing, the most beautiful rendition of "I Dreamed a Dream" that most of us have ever heard. Within nine days of her televised debut, videos of that audition, subsequent interviews of her, and her 1999 rendition of "Cry Me a River" had been viewed a combined total of over 100 million times on the Internet.<sup>1</sup>

Time for survey question #2: How many people here watch "American Idol" or "America's Got Talent"? Again, a good number of us.

Have you ever stopped to wonder why we have such a fascination with these shows? What is it about these amateurs that compels us to watch? If we were simply seeking to watch some good talent, surely there are other things we could tune into. We could put on some good music. Watch a movie. And yet, millions of people all around the world watch this sort of amateur entertainment every week.

I have a theory as to why this sort of entertainment is so compelling to us. I think it's because these shows are about ordinary people who are energized by a dream. We enjoy watching someone, plucked out of obscurity, rocket onto the world stage. We like to see these amateurs succeed. In fact, the more ordinary the winner – someone like Susan Boyle – the more fun it is to see them succeed. And perhaps, just perhaps, some of us, too, harbor a secret dream to be recognized for our hidden talent and plucked from our own pool of obscurity.

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I'd like to spend some time today talking to you about the twelve disciples. These are men whom Jesus picked out. Ordinary people, who were leading ordinary lives, and from all accounts, quite obscure. There was probably nothing that would have made them stand out in a crowd.

And yet, Jesus chose them. Why? The Gospel writer Mark certainly never answers that question for us, at least explicitly. All throughout Mark the disciples are depicted as nothing less than a bumbling bunch of fools. Despite witnessing miracles and being taught by Jesus himself, they just never seem to “get it.” It’s so bad that even Peter, the rock on which Jesus said he would build his church, turns into a quivering mass of jelly in the end and denies Jesus.

And maybe, just maybe, this is why Jesus chose this unlikely group to be his inner circle of disciples. They’re everymen. Ordinary. Just like you and me. Vascillating back and forth from astute and profound faith, to doubt and fear. Do we always “get it”? Do we always grasp the fullness of what God is up to in this world, and the vastness of what God has done for each of us, personally? I think if we’re honest with ourselves, the answer would have to be, “No.”

I think this is part of the reason why we Christians have had not only an enduring respect for these disciples, but a deep love for them as well. They are we. We can relate to them. They’re ordinary people. Just like you and me.

And yet, these ordinary people are called out of their obscurity to do extraordinary things. Or, perhaps I should better phrase that: they're *sent out* to do extraordinary things.

I had to go back and do some digging in my Greek New Testament, but here's what I found... In verse 30 of today's reading, the Twelve are referred to as "apostles." This is most likely the only place in the Gospel of Mark where they are called that. If you look in the Bibles in the seats in front of you, you'll find that in chapter 3, verse 14, they're also called apostles, but there should also be a little footnote there that says something like, "Other ancient authorities lack 'whom he also named apostles'." What that means is that some of the earliest existing manuscripts of the book of Mark don't have that phrase in chapter 3, verse 14. That phrase is taken from newer manuscripts, most likely an insertion by a later copyist.

So, getting back to today's reading... in verse 30 Mark calls these men not "the Twelve" as he had previously, or even "the disciples," but "apostles." Probably the only place he calls them that in the entire book of Mark. Very intentional. That noun – apostle – comes from the verb *apostello*, "to send." It means "to send forth, to send out, to commission, send with authority, send for a purpose."

Today's reading from Mark begins with the disciples – the apostles, those who had been sent out by Jesus to preach and heal – reporting back to Jesus on their first mission trip. Two Sundays ago we talked about them being sent on this mission, with only the clothes on their back. And Mark told us then that they preached repentance, cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.<sup>2</sup>

So now the disciples have returned. They have great tales to tell of their trip! Jesus calls them away to some well-deserved rest. But every time they try to get away, the crowds find Jesus. They come to hear his teaching, they bring their sick to be healed. *He is moved by compassion for them.* He delays their rest so that he may see to the manifest needs of the crowds.

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Now, I'd be willing to bet if I asked you all to tell me something about who Susan Boyle was before she became an international celebrity, you could tell me things like: She's a 48-year-old woman, never married, who lived alone with her cat in a small town in Scotland. You probably also know that she performed many times at local retirement homes.

But did you also know that Susan spent most of her life caring for her aged mother, until her death two years ago? Did you know that she's an active member of her local church? Did you know that she volunteered countless hours visiting the sick and shut-in members of that congregation?

Here is an ordinary woman, living in obscurity, doing extraordinary things. She obviously took seriously Jesus' call to all of us to be apostles, to be sent forth to show for others the same sort of care and compassion Jesus had demonstrated when he was here on Earth.

I, too, dream a dream. I dream a dream that all of us will hear and respond to Jesus' call to care for all people with compassion. "We are apostles when we go and do what Jesus sends us to do. We are not Jesus, but he dares to make us his substitutes."<sup>3</sup> Flawed though we may be, Jesus wants to use *us* for the good of the world. I dream a dream that we will all be content to labor in obscurity in carrying out our calling, never seeking fame or fortune, but loving one another as Jesus loves each one of us.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, you have called us to be your apostles. Now, we pray, take what we have and bless it, use it for the good of a hurting world. Enable us to be your assistants. Amen.<sup>4</sup>

[1,321 words]

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<sup>1</sup> Dobuzinskis, Alex. 20 April 2009. "Susan Boyle breaks past 100 million online views". Reuters, <http://blogs.reuters.com/fanfare/2009/04/20/susan-boyle-breaks-past-100-million-online-views/>, downloaded 7/19/09.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 6:12-13

<sup>3</sup> William Williamon, "Amateurs, All" in *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Inver Grove Heights, MN: Logos Productions, Inc., 2009), 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.