

The Disciples of Jesus¹
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Stouffville United Church
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The story of Pentecost is about the birth of the church. We know from the account in Acts that the disciples were gathered together in that upper room – Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James. And, they were there together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

There were quite a few people gathered in that room. Eleven disciples, plus some wives and children, and some other women. This was truly the first congregation of the church. And it was into this room, into this congregation, that the Holy Spirit, on that epic day, burst into their comfortable ways, and shook them from their placidness, and stirred up their dreams, and provoked visions, and pushed them out into the street to start sharing some of that amazing Pentecostal energy. We know that Peter will set off to share the Good News with whoever he meets. And some of the other more well-known disciples would set off on their adventures too.

But today, I want to lift up the presence of the quieter followers in the picture. I want to learn about them. In six short vignettes, you will hear about these people. You will hear about their story, and you will be invited to consider if what they have offered in their living, in their faith, is something that resonates with you – something that you feel is also a part of your identity as a follower of Jesus Christ.

For each person we will hear about, the reader will suggest a spiritual practice and a rule of living for that person. Consider if it is something that might guide *you*, strengthen *you* in this very different time we find ourselves in – the reality of living in a pandemic.

I want to thank Elizabeth Carr, Reid Andrews, Phil Teillet, Joanna Parry, Courtney Britton, and Cindy Duncan for inviting us into the lives of these very first Christians from over 2,000 years ago. And so, let's here about James the Less!

James the Less, read by Elizabeth Carr

James the Less died in 61 CE in Jerusalem. He is named as the ninth disciple in the gospel of Mark, and was in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost.

What We Know:

James the Less may have been a carpenter. His mother's name is Mary. He just appeared among the disciples with no story of his call or arrival. Some say that he might have been a brother to Jesus. Since there were two James', he became James the Lesser. Later on, he may have become the bishop of Jerusalem, succeeding Peter.

¹ "The Disciples of Jesus" was written by David Robertson & Susan Lukey, High River United Church, High River Alta. It was published in *Gathering: Resources for Worship Planners, Pentecost 1 2020, Year A*, page 77. Used with permission. Six stories from the collection were used for this Pentecost sermon.

Spiritual Practice: Accompaniment

Rule for Living the Way of Jesus: Sometimes we just need to show up and be there alongside people. We don't have to know what to say or to do.

How can I be more like James?

Who has been a 'James' in my life?

Judas Thaddeus, otherwise known as Jude – read by Reid Andrews

Jude was born in Galilee and died in Edessa, Northern Greece. Jude is listed in the Gospel of Luke as the 11th disciple.

What We Know: It is hard to have the name Judas when the other Judas was known as the betrayer/traitor. He was also called “Jude” for short, or Thaddeus (Big Heart) as a nickname, which means that he must have been very loving, generous, or courageous. Tradition says that he was a farmer and was married. He moved from sowing seeds in the land to sowing the seeds of good news. After Jesus' resurrection, tradition says that Judas Thaddeus preached in Syria and Lebanon, and Phoenicia and Greece.

Spiritual Practice: Don't Worry

Rule for Living the Way of Jesus: Sow seeds in faith and then entrust the outcome to God

How can I be more like Jude?

Who has been a 'Jude' in my life?

Barnabas – read by Phil Teillet

Barnabas was born in Cyprus, and died in Cyprus in 61 CE. His real name was Joseph of Cyprus but he was given the name Barnabas by the apostles. The name Barnabas means 'son of encouragement.'

What We Know: Barnabas, Titus, Silas, and Silvanus were all fellow travellers with the apostle Paul on his journeys. Barnabas may have become friends with Paul when they studied with the same rabbi in Jerusalem. Barnabas was from a Jewish family and grew up in Cyprus. He had come to Jerusalem, and there he encountered the followers of the Way of Jesus soon after the resurrection of Jesus. He was so moved by the teachings of the apostles that he sold a field belonging to him and gave all of the money to the apostles to help anyone who was in need. He was one of the first teachers in Antioch, Greece. Paul and Barnabas travelled through Greece and Turkey together and to Jerusalem.

Spiritual Practice: Encouragement

Rule for Living the Way of Jesus: Encourage others! Speak the truth in love.

How can I be more like Barnabas?

Who has been a 'Barnabas' in my life?

Dorcas – Read by Joanna Parry

What We Know: We meet Dorcas in the Book of Acts. Dorcas lived in Joppa (now Tel Aviv, Israel). She was a seamstress known for the tunics and other clothes she made. She was also known for all the good works she did and for her acts of charity, for she was always there to help others. She particularly helped the widows, older women whose husbands had died and who had no male relatives to care for them. When she dies, Peter brings her back to life.

Spiritual Practice: Compassion

Rule for Living the Way of Jesus: Use what you enjoy and are skilled at to care for others!

How can I be more like Dorcas?

Who has been a 'Dorcas' in my life?

The Women Who Followed Jesus – Read by Courtney Britton

The names of some of these women are recorded in scripture: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Suzanna, Mary, mother of Jesus, Salome, Mary Clopas.

What We Know: The women don't get much attention in scripture or the tradition, but Jesus welcomes women as equals within his group of disciples. Later, following this practice of Jesus, Paul declares that all are equal, all are one in Christ, male or female, slave or free, no matter the culture or nationality. The women stayed with Jesus at the cross, even though the men all fled. The women were the first to discover Jesus' resurrection, though the men wouldn't believe them. Women would become key leaders in the early church, starting congregations, and presiding at worship and sacraments.

Spiritual Practice: Loyalty

Rule for Living the Way of Jesus: Stay loyal when things fall apart. Resurrection awaits!

How can I be more like these women?

Who has been like these women in my life?

Children – Read by Cindy Duncan

There are many scripture stories about children as disciples in all four gospels. Here are some familiar phrases: Become like a child to enter God's kingdom. If you welcome a child, you welcome me, says Jesus. Jesus welcomes and blesses the children. A boy shares his loaves and fish with the 5,000. Jesus often referred to the disciples as children, reminding them of the approach to faith he valued.

What We Know: The children are not named by given names in the gospels, but they were part of Jesus' group and were right at hand when Jesus wanted to remind the disciples of who and

what was most important. Jesus valued their presence and used them as examples. While the disciples didn't want the children to bother Jesus, Jesus said, "Don't send them away, for of such is my kingdom." After Jesus' resurrection, they were part of households that were baptized into the faith. Imagine these children who were part of Jesus' band of disciples growing up and going out to share the good news.

Spiritual Practice: Joyful abandon!

Rule for Living the Way of Jesus: The goal isn't to be number one at anything. The goal is to serve joyfully!

How can I be more like the children?

Who has been a 'child' in my life?

We have heard about the men, James the Less, Jude, and Barnabas. We have heard about Dorcas and the women who were in that upper room. We have heard about the children. The Holy Spirit touched each of these people in the early days of the church. Do you think you share some spiritual DNA with one of them in particular?

Have you found that you have the gift of accompanying,
of walking beside someone in a time of need?

Are you the one who encourages the other, with a word, or a smile?

Do you have a special gift, like knitting or sewing,
that you work away at to make a difference in this world?

Are you the one who brings joy into a space,
by your laughter and humour and pure love of life?

Are you the one who believes in each and every day
that there is no need to worry when you've got God with you?

Are you someone who persists in the effort to stay the course
because you trust in God?

Pentecost is the celebration of these gifts of the Spirit – gifts that affirm faith, gifts that celebrate others, gifts that lift up and heal. Pentecost is more than just a day in the church calendar. It is a day when we believe a little bit more in the power of the Holy Spirit within us, to do more than we could ever ask or imagine.

Come Holy Spirit, come. And open our hearts to you!

Thanks be to God. Amen.