

We read to know we are not alone. Yet again, we may persist in saying that we have little in common, character-wise with those twelve men who were named as Jesus' "official" disciples. However you understand the story, they still appear to have given up their normal lives, homes and jobs to follow a wandering preacher. They become pioneers in a new religion; movers and shakers of a whole new world. Not many people are made of that kind of stuff. Most of us would not know where to start.

But were these men so extra-ordinary? We actually know very little about them but what we do know is hardly super-human. Peter had a mouth that worked faster than his brain, James and John had notoriously short fuses-even Jesus called them sons of thunder-, Levi or Matthew as he was also known was a corrupt tax official, Simon the Zealot was a freedom fighter, Thomas was man who had serious doubts and Judas ended up betraying Jesus to his death. I rather think that if Jesus applied for a job as a human resources manager, he would not even make the short list. And if you read on into the history of the early church, it is other names that come into prominence: Paul, Silas, Barnabus, Mark, James the brother of Jesus; while many of the original twelve fade into obscurity.

So these twelve were not super-human and most of them never achieved celebrity status. Once again, we can be drawn back into the story. These men were ordinary human beings after all and perhaps the most important thing to note about them was that they followed Jesus simply because they wanted to. Yes, he must have had a compelling personality but he was not a bully, he was not a brainwasher and he quite obviously did not employ an elitist selection procedure. People followed him because he answered a need in them and awoke a potential in them. When they were with Jesus they felt as though they had come home, to the place where they wanted to be and the people they dreamed of becoming.

In a play called "Nicodemus" Andrew Young has John trying to explain to Nicodemus why he followed Jesus: *I only know that as we followed him.... we were not walking on the earth at all; it was another world where everything was strange and new and shining. We pitied men and women at their business for they knew nothing of what we knew.Perhaps it was some miracle he did? It was indeed; more miracles than one. I was not blind and yet he gave me sight; I was not deaf and yet he gave me hearing; nor was I dead, yet me he raised to life.*

These men had exactly the same longings that any of us have. They longed for love, unconditional love, yet powerful love that could bring out the best in them. They craved forgiveness for everything they had messed up in life and a powerful forgiveness which could give them second chances, and third... and fourth. They dreamed of a better world and of someone who could lead them and keep them inspired in creating it. They wanted something greater than themselves in which they could trust. They wanted to experience God as a living reality rather than as a textbook theory. All of this they found in the person of Jesus, because in him they found that living reality of God and that was why they followed him.

Yes, Thomas would still have doubts and Peter would still put his foot in it. James and John would shout their mouths off and Simon would use his fists to do the talking. They would none of them be as wise or as brave or as loving as they ought to be but it did not matter because they had learned that the living reality of God was to be found through an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ. His love made up for the deficiencies in theirs. His power was stronger than their weakness. His forgiveness

