



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: Apostle v. Disciple

Talking to the Kids

To start this conversation with your kids, it is first important to understand what the two terms mean.

To be a disciple is to be a student. To be an apostle is to be someone sent, as an emissary, on behalf of the one doing the sending.

We can be disciples of many teachers, from Jesus, to our class teacher, to a sports coach, to a life philosophy guru.

When we are disciples of Jesus, we are learning about God's Kingdom and its values as specifically taught by Jesus. These values are grace, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, justice, just to name a few.

Apostles are a little different. Your coach doesn't send you into the world to teach others as he did; your classroom teacher doesn't send you into the world to do as she does. But disciples of Jesus are sent into the world. What we learn from Jesus becomes what we teach to others, as Jesus' emissaries.

Week 5: Matthew chapters 9 and 10

- Can you name the 12 disciples? Or the 12 Apostles? These terms get used interchangeably across the 4 Gospels, and even across the letters, and the most common list of names we use is actually based on tradition, not on the Bible. Because if we actually used the Bible, we will come up with a much larger list of officially identified disciples/apostles. Let's take a look at this list:
- From Matthew 10 we have (1) Simon Peter; (2) Andrew; (3) James; (4) John; (5) Philip; (6) Bartholomew; (7) Thomas; (8) Matthew; (9) James, son of Alphaeus; (10) Thaddeus; (11) Simon the Cananaean; (12) Judas Iscariot; and! (13), some ancient transcripts do not include Thaddeus, but instead have Lebbaeus.
- Now, Mark 3 has an identical list, but earlier in chapter 2, Mark adds a 14th name with Levi, Son of Alphaeus.
- Luke 6 and Acts 1 change Simon the Cananaean to Simon the Zealot, there are two Judas', Judas Iscariot and (15) Judas, son of James, replacing Thaddeus all together. And since Judas commits suicide, and the group believe they need a 12th Apostle, the elect (16) Matthias to take Judas Iscariot's place.
- John has a completely shortened list. There is no list of 12 in John's Gospel. There is only Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John not named separately but only jointly as the sons of Zebedee, Philip, Thomas, Judas Iscariot -- and we add (17) Nathaniel and (18) the Beloved Disciple, who may or may not be associated with John as tradition often claims.
- The comes Paul's letters and we get (19) James the brother of Jesus; (20) Andronicus; (21) Junia; and (22) Paul, himself.
- So why do we focus on 12? Ancient numerology and faith traditions linked to the number 12 (think 12 tribes of Israel, for instance). And tradition needs us to have simple things, so early art, the primary teacher of faith concepts in a generally illiterate culture, simplified the list to 12. And because we have this concept that everything in the Bible must agree with itself, we have a need to simplify the list.
- But to take the Bible seriously, we must realize a lot of folks carried the title disciple and or apostle. And what is more important than how the Gospels and letters identify the lists, is how we function in today's world as both disciple and apostle. And if you really get all worked up over which gospel writer or letter writer got the list 100% correct, just take a moment, and try to list all the members of our church, without using your membership directory. And you will soon realize the writers of scripture are allowed some leeway as they tell us about those who were students and emissaries of Jesus.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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