

**Luke 6:1-16 Narrative Lectionary 066: Lord of the Sabbath**  
**.Jan. 27**

“Prayer Before Choosing”

Most of today’s reading is about how to observe the Sabbath. And since that’s something that is really hard to do in our society, it’s worth reflecting on what observing the Sabbath in 21<sup>st</sup> century America might look like.

But I’m going to leave that reflection to you because I feel compelled to focus on verse 12 of today’s reading. Verse 12 is just a little a little note that Luke adds before he lists the names of the apostles. It doesn’t seem to have anything to do with the Sabbath dispute or with the calling of the apostles. But this little, seemingly throw-away verse might be one of the most important verses in the whole Bible for us 21<sup>st</sup> century American Christians.

It says: “Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.” That’s it. And then the next day Jesus chose the twelve apostles from those who had been following him.

That one little verse keeps hitting me over the head, saying, “Prayer before choosing. Prayer before choosing. Prayer before choosing.” And now that I reflect on it, it’s also telling me, “Prayer in controversy. In controversy, Prayer.

Jesus has just spent the day in what must have been some pretty rancorous controversy. It started with some serious questions about a subject that all good, pious Jews are serious about: the Sabbath observance. But the disagreements between Jesus and the Pharisees are pretty sharp, and by the end of the second episode, the Pharisees are filled with fury and starting to talk about what they are going to do to Jesus.

An intense day. How might one deal with such a day? Hmm? What have you seen in others and in yourself? Well, one might storm around slamming doors. Or yell and scream. Or take it out on some poor, defenseless person. Or plot to get even. That can be deliciously fun. As Khan says in *Star Trek II*, “Revenge is a dish best served cold.” Or we could bitch, moan, and complain. And if we don’t get stuck in that mode, that’s not an entirely bad thing to do--those raw emotions have to go somewhere.

Here’s what Jesus does. Jesus deals with the intense day he has had that was filled with sharp conflict by praying. I have found that when I take my bitching, moaning, and complaining to God in prayer, my moaning, and complaining sound a little different. Perhaps that’s because I am conscious of the One to whom I am talking. Sometimes I use the Psalms, and I channel my complaints through them. And there are *lot* of Psalms of complaint, so taking my complaints to God has some good precedent. Maybe that’s what Jesus was doing on the mountain that night.

Pouring out raw emotions to God in prayer is a good way to begin to deal with them. I invite you to try it. I also invite your prayers for those who might be experiencing controversy or conflict.

Specifically I invite your prayers for our friends at Christ Church. I've mentioned before that they are facing a very difficult financial situation, due mainly to the mortgage on their building. That situation has led to the resignation of my friend, Fr. David Green, effective June 30 at the latest. Just to be absolutely clear, there was no conflict that led to his resignation, only lack of money. But any time something like this happens, people get upset. Hold them, uphold them in prayer.

Prayer followed Jesus' intense day. And prayer preceded his choosing of the apostles. Jesus' choice was a prayerful one. We've just chosen some new council members. I suppose being a church council member is not quite up to the level of being an apostles, but they are entrusted with the leadership of this church. How were these nominees chosen? We had a pretty long list of spiritual leadership qualities we were looking for. But I think I could have done a better job of leading our church council in prayer as we lifted up nominees.

And at our first meeting, our church council will choose officers for this congregation. I am calling on all-church council members especially, but also all-to be in continual prayer over our choices. Prayer before choosing. Prayer before choosing. Prayer before choosing.

When a congregation goes to one of the ELCA's mission directors because it has declined and wants to be renewed, the mission director tries to guide the congregation into prayer and Bible study. There was a time when mission directors came with programs and strategies. But we have reached a time when the good old tried and true have become the tried and found wanting. What do we do? Some wise person noticed that when Jesus was to appoint the apostles—those whom he would send out in mission—he spent the night before praying about it. Hmm. Maybe we should be doing that, too. Maybe what we most need is the kind of spiritual renewal that comes through prayer so that we are aligned with what God is up to in our world, so that we are aligned with God's mission.

I will keep suggesting that we at Living Water engage in some program that invites everyone here to engage in Bible study and prayer groups. Some day we'll be ready for that. And then, over the course of time, we'll begin to hear what God wants for us to do for the sake of the world and begin to hear what wonders God has in store for us.