**Disciples of Jesus Service:**

**July General Council 44 Worship Service**

This service is a Gathering Worship Resource Service by David Robertson, Susan Lukey, and Gord Dunbar, 2020, available on [gatheringworship.ca](https://gatheringworship.ca/), with additional service notes added by the General Council 44 Worship Team and Mission and Service. Gathering is a publication of The United Church of Canada.

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# Gathering and Praise

## Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
**And also with you.**

## Acknowledgement of the Territory

## Gathering Hymn

VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”

## Welcome and Announcements

(insert information and news about General Council)

## Call to Worship

We are here as disciples:
**learners along the way, mentored by Rabbi Jesus.**We are here as apostles:
**sent out by Jesus to share the good news of God’s love.**We are here to join followers of Jesus from every generation,
**thousands upon thousands who have lived and learned the Way of Jesus.
With them, we join in worship today.**

## Prayer of the Day

**Rabbi Jesus, we come to sit at your feet and learn from you.
We come to learn from those who have been your disciples in generations past and in this present generation.
May what we learn here transform our lives, so that we may be enthused for the living of your Way and the sharing of your Good News, today and every day. Amen.**

## Lighting of the Christ Candle

MV 156 “Dance with the Spirit”

## Prayer of Confession (all)

**We struggle to listen actively and openly to your calling, O God.
Worried that we cannot measure up to what you need in your disciples, certain we are not “pure” enough to proclaim your good news, afraid to step out alone, we profess false humility when you call us to “Go.” Open our hearts to dare and our actions to share your possibilities, we pray.** (silent prayer)

## Words of Assurance

We are prepared and equipped to go into the world as disciples of Christ. The Spirit inspires, God’s grace refines, and Christ’s example directs. In community, through our faith-filled relationships, we become. Thanks be to God for this gift and this challenge. Amen.

*―*Gord Dunbar, Kincardine P.C., Kincardine, Ont.

## Story Time

Explore the meaning of disciple, i.e., it’s about being a learner. We are all learners on the Way of Jesus. Jesus believed that children had a discipleship role and that they had something to teach the adult disciples. Share some stories of how children helped Jesus. See below for more information on [Children](#_Children) as disciples.

Or if you will be having communion:

Ask: Have you ever grown anything?

Share: Show a photo of grapes growing on a vine. Invite the children to point out what they notice about the picture, including the vine, branches and fruit.

Explain: In the book of John (chapter 15) in the Bible, it says that Jesus is the vine and we are branches. It explains that because we are close to Jesus, we bear fruit.

Ask: What do you think that means?

Explain: Without the vine, there wouldn’t be any branches. That means we are connected to Jesus and rely on him, especially when we follow in his way. He gives our spirit life and helps us live our lives to bear fruit, in other words to make the world a better place.

Ask: What kinds of things do you do to make the world a better place?

Ask: What kinds of things does our church do to make the world a better place?

Discuss things your church does to “bear fruit” in the world, including supporting Mission & Service. As the children speak, write these things down individually on grape-shaped cards. Distribute one to each child.

Pray: Invite the children to hold the cards carefully in their palm as you give thanks for what each says in prayer.

Afterwards, ask the children to place the cards carefully on the communion table.

If appropriate, you might want to share grapes with the children, or give the children a colouring sheet on which they can write or draw different ways they bear fruit or help make the world a better place.

## Hymn

VU 597 “Simon, Simon, a fisherman”
VU 605 “Jesus, teacher, brave and bold”

# Receiving God’s Word

## Prayer of Illumination (all)

**As disciples of the Way of Jesus, we are ready to discover and engage your word for us today. Bless us, Gracious God, in this endeavour. Amen.**

## Epistle

Colossians 3:12–17
Sing psalms and spiritual songs.
 Herein is Wisdom.
 **Thanks be to God.**

## Gospel

Matthew 4:18–22
Jesus calls the first disciples.
 Herein is Wisdom.
 **Thanks be to God.**

## Sermon

* Share responses from a diversity of people to one or all of the following questions:
* What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus in the 21st century?
* Who do you say Jesus is?
* How have you known Jesus?
* How do you follow in Jesus’ Way?
* What images of Jesus do you wrestle with?

There will be several testimonial videos that can also be shared ([youtube.com/user/unitedchurchofcanada](https://www.youtube.com/user/unitedchurchofcanada)).

* Find creative ways to make use of the background information on the various [disciples](#_The_Disciples_of) below. Perhaps invite people to consider the Spiritual Practice and Rule for Living the Way of Jesus for each disciple. Which disciple do you feel the closest to? Individually, communally? Which disciple do you not at all understand? Yet, Jesus chose everyone to be part of his band.
* Introduce the congregation to [disciples of Jesus](#_The_Disciples_of) (see below) and share how they described Jesus and how they followed in his way. These disciples may be people within your community, famous saints, or some of the disciples we learn about in the Bible (see background info on [disciples](#_The_Disciples_of) below).

# Responding to God’s Word

## Hymn

VU 578 “As a fire is meant for burning”

## Mission & Service

### One of the Best Answers to WWJD?

The question What would Jesus do? often shortened to the acronym “W.W.J.D.” has graced wrist bands, T-shirts and bumper stickers since the 1990s. And while it might sound like an overly worn cliché, it’s a question that can lead our spirit and by extension our lives to profound transformation.

What did Jesus do? He crossed a lot of boundaries. In fact, when we think about the boundaries that separate people―things like money, gender, education, culture, religion and class―Jesus crossed them all.

He struck up a conversation with a Samaritan woman in a culture where it wasn’t socially acceptable for men and women much less Jewish people and Samaritans to speak to one another. He healed the bodies and souls of people suffering from a variety of diseases when it was sinful to have anything to do with them. He visited the homes of tax collectors and sex trade workers and advocated for the rights of widows, orphans and those living in poverty. He not only valued children in a time when they were considered such drains on society that they were abandoned on roadsides, he told his followers that unless they were more like children, they wouldn’t enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the same way, our generosity through Mission & Service breaks down walls that divide and builds bridges that draw us together.

Your generosity supports organizations like hospitals, counselling centres, drop-in circles, and homeless shelters that are there when people need them most. Your gifts sustain education programs that teach farming skills, provide job training, and help remove obstacles so children can remain in school. Your generosity stands up for victims of human trafficking, ensures workers and children know their rights, and advocates for those persecuted because of their sexual orientation, gender or beliefs. It fosters anti-racism, supports healing and reconciliation, and deepens spiritual practice.

Through Mission & Service, the arms of your generosity stretch wide, reaching into schools, camps, hospitals, shelters, prisons, and churches with three main goals: to help transform lives, deepen meaning and purpose, and build a better world.

Mission & Service is one of our church’s best answers to the question *What would Jesus do?*

Thank you for your support.

## Prayers of the People and The Lord’s Prayer

## Offering and Doxology

VU 540 “Grant us, God, the grace”

## A Statement of Faith

God welcomes us as followers and apostles of Jesus.
Jesus came to teach us that God forgives our sins;
God accepts all people as equals;
God encourages us to love each other;
God is present in us always;
God guides us through life’s journeys.
Jesus gave us light when we saw only shadows, and now, in turn, we show that light to the world.

*―*The 1999 Youth Confirmation Class, Waterville-Hatley-North Hatley P.C., Que.

## Hymn

VU 595 “We are pilgrims”

## Commissioning and Benediction

Be bold. Be brave. Be blessed, beloved.
Be determined. Be deep. Be daring, disciples.
Together, connected in the name of Love,
wade through the waters. We are hip deep in glory;
awash in hope, filled with love.
Amen

## Sung Response

VU 572 “Send me, Lord”

## The Disciples of Jesus

Who were the disciples of Jesus and what do we know about them? If asked, we might easily name Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John as disciples, and probably Judas Iscariot. But the others of the twelve disciples are listed slightly differently in each gospel, and we know that there were many who faithfully followed and learned from Jesus as well.

The following information about the disciples was compiled for a worship series at High River United Church. Some of the information is biblical; other information comes from the stories of the tradition. Week by week, we considered one (or a group of) disciples, learning from that disciple, hearing their story, and considering a spiritual practice and rule for living related to that disciple.

You might use this information about the disciples in various ways, for example,

* to create one or more worship services. See the summer bulletins in this issue for a worship service that could be used on one or more Sundays with a focus on the disciples of Jesus.
* as a Bible study or devotional tool. Using the spiritual practice and rule for living, one might ask, for example, “How can I be more like Thomas?” and “Who has been a Thomas in my life?”
* to create stations or posters (possibly in a Messy Church format) for the exploration of each of the disciples.
* to project information (and a visual) connected with a disciple each week before worship, for meditation and reflection.
* to pray your way through and with the disciples.

―David Robertson & Susan Lukey, High River U.C., High River, Alta.

### Simon Peter

**Hebrew:** Shimon שִׁמְעוֹן, meaning “he has heard.”

**Greek:** Cephas Κηφᾶς, meaning “rock”; becomes “Peter” through Latin.

**Born:** 1 BCE in Bethsaida

**Died:** October 13, 64 CE, in Rome

**Symbol:** keys

**Feast Day:** January 29

**Key Scriptures:**Matthew 4:18–22 Fisherman Simon is one of first disciples called.
Matthew 16:13–23 Jesus asks, “Who am I?” and Peter answers.
Mark 9:2–8 Peter, James, and John go up the mountain with Jesus.
Luke 22:54–62 Peter denies knowing Jesus.
John 21:1–21 Peter goes fishing after Jesus dies.

**What We Know:** Simon Peter was a fisherman and one of the first disciples. He was married and had a house in Capernaum. He was always right in the middle of things and often said or did the wrong thing at the wrong time. He tried walking on water. He promised to stay with Jesus to the end but then denied knowing Jesus. After Jesus’ death, he went back to fishing until Jesus appeared to the disciples. He was a spokesperson and leader of the followers after Jesus died, especially in Jerusalem. He later travelled to Rome and died under Nero. He is considered the first pope by the Roman Catholic Church.

**Spiritual Practice:** Boldness!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** It’s never too late to get it right. Take risks and give your whole heart to live your faith even if you mess up.

### Andrew

**Greek:** Andreas Ἀνδρέας, meaning “brave and strong.”

**Born:** 1 or 2 CE in Bethsaida

**Died:** after 50 CE in Patras, Greece

**Symbol:** X-shaped cross or two fish

**Feast Day:** November 30

**Key Scriptures:**Matthew 4:18–22 Fisherman Andrew is one of the first disciples called.
Mark 13:1–8 Andrew, Peter, James, and John question Jesus.
John 1:35–42 Andrew introduces Simon Peter to Jesus.

**What We Know:** Andrew was Simon Peter’s younger brother and one of the first disciples called to follow Jesus. He shared a house in Capernaum with Peter’s family. Andrew was first a follower of John the Baptist. Then, because of what John said, he checked out Jesus and decided to follow him. Andrew introduced his brother Simon Peter to Jesus. Andrew is in the group of disciples who are closest to Jesus. He brought the boy with the loaves and fishes to Jesus. Tradition says that after Jesus’ resurrection, Andrew headed along the Black Sea, into Turkey and the Ukraine, preaching the good news. He became the patron saint of Ukraine, Romania, and Russia.

**Spiritual Practice:** Humility

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** You don’t have to be the one in the spotlight. Live the gifts God has given you whether or not you are famous (like your sibling or friend is).

### The Sons of Zebedee

#### James

**Hebrew:** Yacov/Jacob יַעֲקֹב, meaning “God protects.”

**Greek:** Yakobos Ιάκωβος; “James” is from the Latin form.

**Nicknames:** Son of Thunder, James the Greater.

**Died:** 44 CE in Judea

**Symbol:** three seashells

**Feast Day:** July 25

#### John

**Hebrew:** Yohanan יוֹחָנָן, meaning “graced by God, blessed.”

**Nickname:** Son of Thunder

**Born:** 6 CE

**Died:** about 100 CE in Ephesus

**Symbol:** eagle; snake and chalice (cup)

**Feast Day:** December 27

**Key Scriptures:**Mark 3:13–19 Jesus nicknames James and John the “Sons of Thunder.”
Mark 9:2–8 Peter, James, and John go up the mountain with Jesus.
Mark 10:35–45 The brothers ask Jesus to promise to do whatever they ask.
Matthew 20:20–28 Mom wants her boys to sit at Jesus’ right and left hands in heaven.
Mark 14:32–42 Peter, James, and John can’t stay awake while Jesus prays.
John 20:1–9 John races Peter to the tomb.

**What We Know:** James and John were born in Bethsaida to Zebedee and Salome. They were two of the first disciples Jesus called; they were asked to give up their boat and leave their father to follow Jesus. Peter, James, and John were Jesus’ closest companions and went up the Mount of Transfiguration with him. Their mother wanted them to sit on Jesus’ right and left sides in heaven, and they agreed. James and John must have had fiery tempers, or spoke loudly, so Jesus called them “Sons of Thunder.” At the cross, Jesus asked John to take care of his mother, Mary, and John did so until her death. John later moved to Ephesus. John is thought to have been the youngest of the disciples, and he outlived the other disciples. He raced Peter to the tomb on Easter morning after Mary Magdalene told of finding it empty. James the Greater was the first disciple martyred for the faith. In Acts 12:2, King Herod had James put to death by sword. James perhaps preached in Spain and Sardinia.

**James’s Spiritual Practice:** Letting go

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Sometimes you have to give up everything you thought important in order to find what you really need.

**John’s Spiritual Practice:** Enthusiasm (from the Greek *en-theos,* meaning “to be filled with God”)

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** When it comes to faith, don’t sit back. Go and find out.

### Philip

**Greek:** Philippos Φίλιππος, meaning “lover of horses.”

**Born:** in Bethsaida

**Died:** 80 CE in Hierapolis (now in Turkey)

**Symbol:** a basket of loaves and fish

**Feast Day:** May 3

**Key Scriptures:**John 1:43–51 Philip meets Jesus and introduces a friend to Jesus.
John 6:4–7 Philip helps Jesus at the feeding of the 5,000.
John 12:20–26 Some Greeks approach Philip asking to see Jesus.
John 14:8–14 Philip asks Jesus to show them God.
Acts 8:4–8 Philip heads out to preach the good news and does well at it.
Acts 8:26–40 Philip teaches an Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus.

**What We Know:** Philip was first a follower of John the Baptist, like Andrew. He was seeking the truth. Andrew introduced Philip to Jesus, and Philip introduced Bartholomew, a.k.a. Nathanael, to Jesus. Philip is believed to have been married and had three daughters. He is typically listed as the fifth of the disciples. Philip was from Bethsaida, like Simon Peter and Andrew. He helped Jesus at the feeding of the 5,000. He is believed to have been the translator for Greeks who came to hear Jesus. After Jesus’ resurrection, Philip became a great preacher and teacher. He converted the Ethiopian eunuch, and those who heard him preach found great joy. An extra-biblical gospel, the Gospel of Philip, is named for him.

**Spiritual Practice:** Seek truth!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** The truth shall set you free. If you don’t feel free, you haven’t found the truth yet. Once you’ve found it, tell everyone.

### Bartholomew

**Hebrew:** bar-tolmai תולמי–בר

**Greek:** Βαρθολομαίος Bartholomaios

In both languages, the name means “son of the furrows or soil.” Also known as Nathanael, meaning “God’s spiritual gift.” In Hebrew, *bar* means “son,” so the name means “son of Tolmai” (Ptolemy). Possibly his full name was Nathanael, son of Tolmai.

**Born:** in Judea

**Died:** 44 CE in Armenia

**Symbol:** knives

**Feast Day:** August 24

**Key Scriptures:**Matthew 10:1–4 Bartholomew is one of the disciples.
John 1:43–51 Jesus sees Nathanael/Bartholomew standing under a fig tree.
Acts 1:13–14 The disciples gather in the upper room to pray.

**What We Know:** Tradition says that Bartholomew was honest, cheerful, agreeable, and looked on the bright side of life. He was likely a fisherman and is usually named sixth among the disciples. He was immediately recognized by Jesus as being an honest and faithful person. Jesus said of him, Here is truly someone in whom there is no deceit. He was first to declare that Jesus is Son of God. After Jesus’ death, Bartholomew/Nathanael was fishing with Peter when Jesus appeared at the seashore and cooked them breakfast. He later went to Armenia to preach the good news and was martyred there.

**Spiritual Practice:** Honesty

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Nurture your spiritual practice and spiritual gifts. They are your true treasure.

### Matthew-Levi

**Hebrew:** Matityahu מַתִּתְיָהו, meaning “gift of God”; Levi לֵּוִי, meaning “priest” or “joined to God.”

**Died:** in Turkey or Ethiopia

**Symbol:** three bags of money

**Feast Day:** September 21

**Key Scriptures:**

Matthew 9:9–13 Matthew leaves his tax booth to follow Jesus.

Mark 2:13–17 Matthew lives in Capernaum.

Luke 5:27–32 Matthew-Levi gives a banquet for Jesus.

**What We Know:** Matthew-Levi lived in Capernaum. He was a despised tax collector who collected import and export taxes at a Roman customs office, and thus was considered to have betrayed his people by working for the Romans. But he is invited to join Jesus’ group, and he gives up his prestigious job to follow. He is most often called Matthew, but the name Levi is used in other places to refer to this tax-collector disciple, maybe indicating he was from the tribe of Levi. He is possibly the oldest of the disciples. He didn’t handle the money, even though he had experience in that field. He could read and write. After Jesus’ resurrection, he remained among his own people for about 15 years, then he left to preach the good news, possibly in Ethiopia or Persia and Turkey. He invited other tax collectors to a banquet for Jesus.

**Spiritual Practice:** Hospitality

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** God welcomes those rejected and judged as unsuitable by society and by other people.

### Thomas Didymus

**Hebrew:** Tomas תאומא

**Greek:** Thomas Θωμᾶς Didymus Δίδυμος

Thomas and Didymus both mean “twin.”

**Nickname:** The Doubter

**Born:** in Galilee

**Died:** December 21, 72 CE, in India

**Symbol:** spear and arrow

**Feast Day:** July 3

**Key Scriptures:**

Mark 3:13–19 Thomas is listed as the eighth disciple.

John 11:16 When Lazarus dies, Thomas urges the disciples to go with Jesus.

John 14:5 Thomas asks Jesus how they will know the way to where he is going.

John 20:19–29 Thomas wants to see and touch Jesus in order to believe.

**What We Know:** Thomas just appeared among the disciples without any story about how he met Jesus. In the Gospel of John, he speaks twice, once at the time of Lazarus’s death and once when he doubts Jesus’ resurrection. Tradition says that Thomas was an architect and built a church structure in India. He is considered to have been a significant Christian leader in India, where shrines built to him remain. He had the bad luck of being out of the room when Jesus first appeared to the disciples and was then criticized for not believing in the resurrection, even though all the other disciples had seen first and then believed.

**Spiritual Practice:** Embrace doubt!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** God accepts us with our doubts and our beliefs, our joys and our sorrows. God meets us where we are.

### James the Less

**Hebrew:** Yacov/Jacob יַעֲקֹב, meaning “God protects.”

**Greek:** Yakobos Ιάκωβος; “James” is the Latin form.

**Nickname:** James the Less or James the Younger, to distinguish him from John’s brother, James

**Died:** about 61 CE, in Jerusalem

**Symbol:** carpenter’s saw

**Feast Day:** May 3

**Key Scriptures:**

Mark 3:13–19 James, son of Alphaeus, is named as ninth disciple.

Acts 1:13 James is in the upper room with the others.

Galatians 1:18–19 James the Lord’s brother. (James the Less might be Jesus’ brother.)

**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. He is named as the son of Alphaeus. Matthew-Levi is also called a son of Alphaeus, but they are never referred to as brothers the way James and John, and Simon Peter and Andrew, are. Some say that he might have been a brother to Jesus. Since there were two Jameses, he became James the Less. Later on, he may have become the bishop of Jerusalem, succeeding Peter.

**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.

### Judas (Jude) Thaddeus

**Hebrew:** Yehudah יְהוּדָה; Judas is from the name Judah, meaning “one who is praised.”

**Greek:** Thaddeus Θαδδαῖος, meaning “big heart, courageous.”

**Born:** in Galilee

**Died:** in Edessa, Northern Greece

**Symbol:** ship

**Feast Day:** October 28

**Key Scriptures:**

Luke 6:12–16 Judas is listed as 11th disciple.

John 14:22 Judas (not Judas Iscariot) asks Jesus why they are allowed to know who he is.

**What We Know:** It was 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 the 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.

### Simon the Zealot

**Hebrew:** Shimon שִׁמְעוֹן, meaning “he has heard.”

**Nickname:** The Zealot, either a very passionate man or a member of the Zealot faction opposing Roman rule

**Died:** May 10, 61 CE, possibly in Britain

**Symbol:** fish lying on a Bible

**Feast Day:** October 28

**Key Scriptures:**

Luke 6:12–16 Simon the Zealot is listed 10th among disciples.

Acts 1:12–14 Simon the Zealot is one of those praying in the upper room.

**What We Know:** Simon just appears among the disciples. The name “Zealot” distinguishes him from Simon Peter. He is also known as “the Cananean” (from Cana). He is one of the lesser disciples, part of the larger group that followed Jesus. Some think he is one of the four brothers of Jesus (Simon, James, Judas, and Joseph) named in Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55–56. Tradition says that, after Jesus’ resurrection, he travelled to North Africa, Persia, and Britain. Other traditions place him as bishop of Jerusalem after James.

**Spiritual Practice:** Passion (suffering love)

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** We point to Jesus the Christ, making Christ the focus, not ourselves.

### Judas Iscariot

**Hebrew:** Yehudah יְהוּדָה, meaning “one who is praised.” Iscariot may indicate the city from which he comes, “of Keriot”

**Nickname:** Traitor, Betrayer, Iscariot (which might be like calling someone a “city slicker”)

**Born:** in Judah, in contrast to rest of the 12, who were from Galilee, already making him an outlier

**Died:** in Jerusalem, just before Jesus

**Symbol:** 30 silver coins

**Key Scriptures:**

Matthew 26:14–50 Judas betrays Jesus to the authorities.

Matthew 27:3–10 Judas regrets what he has done and tries to return the money.

John 12:1–8 Judas holds the common purse for the disciples; known to steal money; complains that Mary has wasted perfume on Jesus.

Matthew 27:3–5 and Acts 1:18–19 Judas’ death, considered to be by suicide.

**What We Know:** Judas Iscariot was the treasurer of the group of Jesus’ disciples. There is no story of how he joined the disciples. Judas is a derivation of Judah. In Genesis 37:26, it is Judah who sells his brother Joseph for 20 pieces of silver. There is some sense that the others never liked Judas and didn’t know why Jesus had him around. He tried to return the 30 pieces of silver he received for betraying Jesus, but the chief priests wouldn’t take it. He died in a fall or by suicide before Jesus’ death. Judas Iscariot felt that he couldn’t live with what he had done, but we know that Jesus would have forgiven him.

**Spiritual Practice:** Forgiveness

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Your will be done, O God, not my will.

### Children

**Hebrew:** Yeled ילד, meaning “a male child”; Yalda ילדה, meaning “a female child.”

**Greek:** Paidion παιδίον, meaning “children”

**Scripture Stories about Children as Disciples:**

Matthew 18:1–5 Become like a child to enter God’s kingdom.

Mark 9:33–37 If you welcome a child, you welcome me, says Jesus.

Luke 7:32 We played the flute and you didn’t dance, the children called.

Luke 9:46–48 The least is the greatest.

Luke 18:15–17 Jesus welcomes and blesses the children.

John 6:1–15 A boy shares his loaves and fish with 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.

### Mary Magdalene

**Hebrew:** Miriam מִרְיָם

**Aramaic:** Maryam, meaning “bitter, rebellion.”

Magdalene indicates that she was from the village of Magdala.

**Nickname:** Apostle to the Apostles

**Died:** in Ephesus or France

**Symbol:** chalice and heart

**Feast Day:** July 22

**Key Scriptures:**

Luke 8:1–3 Women supported Jesus financially.

Matthew 27:55–56 and Mark 15:40–41 Mary is among the women who watch as Jesus dies.

Matthew 28:1–10 Mary—Apostle to the Apostles.

Mark 14:42–47 Mary sees where the body is laid.

Mark 16:1–9 Mary goes with spices to the tomb.

Luke 24:1–12 Mary and the women tell the disciples that Jesus has risen.

John 19:25b–27 Mary stands with the mother of Jesus at the cross.

John 20:1–18 The risen Jesus speaks with Mary.

**What We Know:** Jesus cast out seven demons from Mary. She then became one of his closest companions. Sometimes the other disciples were jealous of her friendship with Jesus. Mary was the first to discover the empty tomb and the first to share the good news of the resurrection, so that in later tradition, she is named as the Apostle to the Apostles.

**Spiritual Practice:** Courage!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Don’t focus on what others think of you. Focus on Jesus and the Way he taught us to live!

### The Women Who Financed and Followed

#### Women Who Financed Jesus’ Group

**Mary Magdalene (**see above)

**Joanna:** Hebrew – ג’ואנה, feminine of John, meaning “God is gracious, blessed one.” Also known as the wife of Herod’s steward, Chuza.

**Suzanna:** Hebrew – Shoshanna שׁוֹשַׁנָּה, meaning “lily.”

#### Other Women Who Followed

**Mary:** mother of Jesus (and James)

**Salome:** Hebrew – Shalomeh שלומית from shalom, meaning “peace.”

**Mary Clopas:** Hebrew – Miriam מִרְיָם;

Aramaic – Maryam, meaning “bitter, rebellion.” Clopas appears to be her husband’s name, perhaps short for “Cleophas” (Luke 24:13–27).

**Key Scriptures:**

Mark 16:1–8 Mary, Mary, and Salome are seized by fear when the tomb is empty.

Luke 8:1–3 The women provide for Jesus out of their own resources.

Luke 10:38–42 Sisters Mary and Martha welcome Jesus to their home.

Luke 23:55–56 The women prepare spices to wrap around Jesus’ body.

Luke 24:1–11 Apostles think women are telling an idle tale that Jesus is risen.

John 19:25–27 The women stand near the cross while Jesus dies.

**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 (Galatians 3:28). We know that it was a group of women who financed Jesus’ ministry. They 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 were key leaders in the early church, started congregations, and presided at worship and sacraments.

**Spiritual Practice:** Generosity and loyalty

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Share your resources generously. Stay loyal when things fall apart. Resurrection awaits!

### Mary, Martha, and Lazarus

**Mary of Bethany:** Hebrew – Miriam מִרְיָם;

Aramaic – Maryam, meaning “bitter, rebellion.”

**Martha of Bethany:** Hebrew – Martah מרתה;

Greek – Μάρθα meaning “lady or mistress.”

**Lazarus:** Hebrew – from Eleazar אלעזר, meaning “God has helped.”

**Feast Day:** July 29 for all three siblings

**Symbols:** Mary – jar of perfume; Lazarus – burial cloths; Martha – broom and keys

**Key Scriptures:**

Luke 10:38–42 Sisters Mary and Martha welcome Jesus to their home.

John 11:1–44 Jesus weeps at the death of his friend Lazarus.

John 12:1–11 Mary anoints Jesus; plot to kill Lazarus.

**What We Know:** Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem. Jesus may have stayed with them when he came to Jerusalem. Martha was good at hospitality. Mary enjoyed learning from Jesus. When Lazarus died, the sisters called Jesus to come. Jesus wept at the death of his friend, then called him out of his tomb. Later, there were those who wanted to kill Lazarus. More people were following Jesus because he had raised Lazarus from the dead, so they wanted to get rid of Lazarus. After the stoning death of Stephen the deacon, Lazarus and Martha fled the Jerusalem area, around 48 CE. They travelled to many areas, possibly including France. Both were said to be good preachers of the gospel. Mary may have stayed to assist with the church in Jerusalem. Eventually, all three made their way to Cyprus, where Lazarus was appointed a bishop. All three died in Cyprus.

**Spiritual Practice:** Home!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Create a home in which friends, family, and strangers may find shelter, nourishment, and rest.

### Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

Who is this mysterious person named in the Gospel of John? Perhaps it is John, the writer of the gospel. Some think it might be Thomas, or Lazarus, or Mary Magdalene. But doesn’t Jesus love all his disciples? Maybe it is you and me—us!

**Symbol:** heart

**Key Scriptures:**

John 13:23–25 The disciple Jesus loves leans against Jesus during supper.

John 18:15–16 Another disciple goes ahead of Peter into the courtyard.

John 19:26 Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved.

John 20:2 Mary ran to Peter and the disciple Jesus loved.

John 21:7 The disciple Jesus loved spoke to Peter.

John 21:20 Peter sees the disciple Jesus loved following them.

**What We Know:** The disciple Jesus loves gets to sit right next to Jesus. The reference to the disciple Jesus loved appears only in the Gospel of John. After Jesus’ resurrection, the phrase is not used again. The emphasis is on Jesus loving this disciple, not this disciple loving Jesus back.

**Spiritual Practice:** Be open to receive!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Don’t block the love that Jesus wants to offer you from God. Keep your heart open and let yourself be the disciple whom Jesus loves.

### Matthias

**Hebrew:** Matityahu מַתִּתְיָהו, meaning “gift of God”; derivation of Matthew.

**Born:** in Judea

**Died:** 80 CE in Jerusalem or Georgia

**Symbol:** axe and Bible

**Feast Day:** May 14

**Key Scriptures:**

Acts 1:15–26 Matthias is elected by the 12.

What We Know: Matthias is one of the many followers who are with Jesus from his baptism through to his death. He was elected by the casting of lots, after Jesus’ resurrection, to replace Judas Iscariot as one of the 12. Tradition says that he preached in Palestine, then travelled to Ethiopia and Macedonia. He was imprisoned for preaching. Tradition says that he was made to drink poison but survived.

**Spiritual Practice:** Commitment

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Don’t abandon the Way! Whether or not you are getting attention for what you’re doing, keep your commitment to Jesus through the challenges.

### Paul

**Hebrew:** Saul שָׁאוּל, meaning “asked for, prayed for.”

**Greek:** Paulos Παῦλος, meaning “small, humble.”

**Nickname:** Apostle to the Gentiles

**Born:** 5 CE in Tarsus

**Died:** 67 CE in Rome

**Feast Day:** June 29

**Symbol:** sword and book

**Key Scriptures:**Acts 9:1–31 Saul’s conversion experience.
Acts 13ff. Paul’s preaching and missionary journeys.
Galatians 1:10–24 Paul’s own account of his conversion.

**What We Know:** Saul/Paul never met Jesus in person and was not part of the original group of disciples. He was born in northern Galilee, grew up in Tarsus, and was a Roman citizen by birth. His father was a rabbi and a Roman citizen. He had a sister and a nephew. Saul studied with Rabbi Gamaliel, who is mentioned in Acts 5:34 and Acts 22:3. Saul became a rabbi, devout and passionate for the Jewish faith. After Jesus’ resurrection, Saul sought out Christians to have them arrested and imprisoned. Then he met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. After that spiritual experience, he was known by his Roman name, Paul. He spent the rest of his life travelling to share the good news. His letters to Christian congregations he visited make up much of the New Testament, including Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians.

**Spiritual Practice:** Evangelize!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** If I am pleasing people, then I am not serving God. My purpose is to share the Good News of Jesus the Christ.

### Timothy

**Greek:** Timotheos Τιμόθεος, meaning “honouring God” or “honoured by God.”

**Born:** 17 CE in Lystra

**Died:** 97 AD

**Feast Day:** January 26

**Symbol:** a broken idol

**Key Scriptures:**Acts 16:1–10 Paul meets Timothy in Lystra and they travel together.
2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul and Timothy write this letter together.
1 & 2 Timothy: Letters written by Paul to Timothy.
Philemon 1:1 Timothy helps Paul write to Philemon about his slave.
Hebrews 13:23 News of Timothy’s release from jail.

**What We Know:** While Jesus was alive, Timothy was a teenager living in Lystra in Asia Minor (now Turkey). His mother was Jewish and his father, Greek. They followed Greek ways. Later, he met Paul, became Paul’s “adopted” son in the faith, and travelled with Paul on some of Paul’s many journeys. Timothy’s mother, Lois, and grandmother, Eunice, both became followers of the Way and were known for their sincere faith. Timothy is praised for his knowledge of the scriptures and is known to have been an excellent teacher of the faith. He served as bishop of Ephesus for 15 years, having been ordained by Paul. He was martyred when he tried to stop a pagan procession when he was 80 years old.

**Spiritual Practice:** Study scripture.

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Do not be a coward but live with a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. Be sincere in your faith, and constantly rekindle the gift of God within you.

### Lydia

**Greek:** Lydia Λυδια, meaning “from Lydia or Lydda.”

**Symbol:** purple cloth

**Feast Day:** August 3

**Key Scriptures:**Acts 16:11–15 Lydia embraces the Way of Jesus and is baptized.

Acts 16:40 Paul and Silas are released from prison and go to Lydia’s house.

**What We Know:** Lydia lived in Philippi and was a dealer in purple cloth. She was an independently wealthy woman, possibly a widow. She ran her own household and her own business. Before meeting Paul, Lydia had chosen to follow the Jewish faith, though she was not born into the Jewish faith.

When Lydia embraces the Way of Jesus, she is baptized along with her whole household. Following that, a house church met in her home.

**Spiritual Practice:** Worship! Pray!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** When you embrace the Way of Jesus, embrace it wholeheartedly and without hesitation. Listen to your heart!

### Dorcas

**Greek:** Dorcas δορκας

**Hebrew:** Tabitha טביתא

Her name means “gazelle” in both languages, also “graceful beauty.”

**Symbol:** needle and thread

**Feast Day:** January 27

**Key Scripture:**Acts 9:36–43 Dorcas the seamstress dies; Peter brings her back to life.

What We Know: 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.

**Spiritual Practice:** Compassion

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

### Phoebe

**Greek:** Phoebe Φοίβη, meaning “radiant, shining.”

**Died:** in Rome

**Feast Day:** September 3

**Symbol:** a scroll

**Key Scripture:**Romans 16:1–2 Paul commends Phoebe, a deacon, to the Christian church in Rome.

**What We Know:** Phoebe was known as a sister in Christ to Paul. She served as a deacon of the church at Cenchrea, the port of the Greek city of Corinth. She travelled to Rome, carrying the letter from Paul found in the New Testament, to deliver it to the church there. Paul instructs the Roman church to welcome her and to help her in whatever way she may require. She helped many people financially and in other ways, including Paul himself.

**Spiritual Practice:** Ready and willing!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Help others in whatever way they require; work from their needs, not your assumptions.

### Barnabas

**Hebrew:** Yosef יוֹסֵף, meaning “may God add to your number”; Barnabas בר נביא, which means “son of encouragement.” His real name was Joseph of Cyprus but was given the name Barnabas by the apostles.

**Born:** in Cyprus

**Died:** 61 CE in Cyprus

**Feast Day:** June 11

**Symbol:** olive branch (symbol of peace)

**Key Scriptures:**Acts 4:32–37 Joseph from Cyprus is named Barnabas, the encourager.
Acts 15:35–39 Paul and Barnabas travel together.
1 Corinthians 9:6 Paul argues that he and Barnabas have a right to work for a living.
Galatians 2:1–10 Barnabas travels with Paul.

**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. Joseph 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.

### Apostle Couples

#### Andronicus and Junia

**Greek:** Andronicus Ανδρόνικος, meaning “victorious warrior”; Junia Ιουνια, meaning “Queen of Heaven.”

**Feast Day:** May 17

**Key Scripture:**Romans 16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, prominent among the apostles.

**What We Know:** Andronicus and Junia lived and preached in Pannonia, later Rome. We have only this one verse referring to this couple. They had high standing in the community of followers. Paul calls them apostles and his relatives, though this may be in faith, not by blood. Paul, Andronicus and Junia were in prison together because of following Jesus’ Way. Andronicus became bishop of Pannonia (on Danube River, in area of Austria-Hungary), and the two preached in that area for many years.

### Prisca and Aquila

**Greek:** Priska Πρίσκα, meaning “ancient, honoured, wise one,” a.k.a. Priscilla; Aquilas Ἀκύλας, meaning “eagle.”

**Feast Day:** July 8

**Key Scriptures:**Acts 18:1–4, 24–28 Prisca and Aquila combine teaching and tent-making.
Romans 16:3 Paul sends his greeting to this couple.
1 Corinthians 16:13–20 Paul sends greetings to the church meeting in their house.
2 Timothy 4:19 Paul once again sends greetings to the couple.

**What We Know:** Paul lived with Prisca and Aquila in Ephesus, working with them in the tent-making trade to support his work as an apostle. They hosted a house church in their home. They did something that “risked their necks” to save Paul’s life (but we don’t know what). This couple instructed Apollos, who in turn, became a great preacher.

**Spiritual Practice:** Relationship!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Acknowledge and work with the gifts, skills, and talents of those around you for the common good.

### The Deacons

**Greek:** Diakonos διάκονος, meaning “one who waits tables, one who serves.”

### ****Stephen****

**Greek:** Stephanos Στέφανος, meaning “crown or garland.”

**Died:** 34 CE in Jerusalem

**Feast Day:** December 26

### The Other Deacons

Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolaus

**Key Scriptures:**

Acts 6:1–7 The seven deacons are chosen to help the apostles.

Acts 6:8—8:1 Stephen preaches. He is arrested, put on trial, and stoned to death.

**What We Know:** Stephen was a man full of faith, grace, power, and the Holy Spirit, who did great wonders and signs. Stephen was chosen as one of seven deacons who would take care of day-to-day affairs in the community of followers of Jesus, such as making sure that the widows and others all got their share of food, allowing the 12 apostles to focus on prayer and teaching. Stephen was also an eloquent speaker and preacher. He was accused, by the temple leadership of the time, of telling lies about God and speaking against God and Moses. They arrested him and put him on trial, calling witnesses who lied about Stephen. Stephen spoke in his own defence, speaking wisely and carefully about his faith. The council decided that Stephen would be stoned to death because they were scared and angry, believing that Stephen was destroying the faith that was important to them. It says they “ground their teeth” at Stephen. Young Saul (later Paul) guarded the coats of the witnesses as Stephen was stoned to death.

**Spiritual Practice:** Serve!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Be faithful in whatever you are called to do to serve God, whether waiting tables or preaching the good news.

### Mary, Joseph, and Jesus’ Family

**Mother:** Hebrew name was Miriam מִרְיָם, meaning “bitter, rebellion.” Mary was between 16 and 20 years old when Jesus was born. Tradition says she lived for 11 years after his death. Her parents were Anne and Joachim. Feast Days: August 15, September 8, December 8, and others. Symbol: the rose.

**Father:** Hebrew name was Yosef יוֹסֵף, meaning “God will increase.” Joseph probably died before Jesus began his ministry. Feast Day: March 19. Symbol: woodworking tools.

**Jesus’ brothers:** James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas.

**Jesus’ sisters:** at least two, but we don’t know their names (see Matthew 13:55–56).

**What We Know:** Jesus grew up in a Jewish family in Nazareth. Joseph and his sons were carpenters. They may have had a shop in Nazareth or worked in the nearby city of Sepphoris. Or they may have been employed by Herod in the building of the Caesarea Maritima. Jesus studied in the synagogue. The family celebrated the Sabbath and the Jewish feast days. There were at least seven children, including Jesus, in the family in which Jesus grew up. During Jesus’ ministry, he didn’t give special status to his family, calling anyone who followed him his family. After his resurrection, his mother, Mary, and his siblings were part of the group of disciples. His brother James may have been one of the key leaders of the growing Christian faith.

**Key Scripture:**

Matthew 13:54–58 Jesus visits his hometown of Nazareth.
Mark 3:31–35 Jesus says that anyone who does the will of God is his family.
Luke 2:41–52 Mary and Joseph take young Jesus to Jerusalem for Passover.
John 19:26–27 His mother, Mary, watches at the cross as he dies.
Acts 1:14 Mother Mary and Jesus’ brothers join disciples in prayer after Jesus’ resurrection.

**Spiritual Practice:** Love unconditionally!

**Rule for Living the Way of Jesus:** Create a caring, respectful family where each person can become all that God intends them to be!

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