



A Message from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

It's now been about a year since the world changed dramatically. The past twelve months have been different than anything we've ever seen in our lifetimes. Many have been taken by surprise by some of the events that have occurred. But not our God. It would be hard to imagine the "everlasting to everlasting", "Alpha and Omega", omniscient God sitting on His throne, saying, "Wow, I didn't see that one coming!".

The scriptures tell us that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He's the same God today as He was a year ago or fifty years ago or 2000 years ago. The world may change but God never changes. On His last night on earth, Jesus told His Apostles, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). As followers of Christ, we have the same ability to overcome the world today as His Apostles did at that time.

In the past year, perhaps some of us have experienced the feeling of fearing for our lives when gathering together. In John 20, the disciples also feared for their lives after the crucifixion of Jesus – *the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews* (John 20:19). What happened next? Jesus appeared and said to them, "*Peace be unto you*". We have experienced the same peace when overcoming our fears to assemble together. Even **Thomas**, who initially doubted that any of this was true because he missed the meeting, later received the same peace from Christ when he met with the other disciples.

Regardless of how careful we've been, some people have gotten ill. Some may have even wondered whether the Lord even cares about what's happening. When the disciples were in a ship that was caught in a great storm, Jesus was asleep. The disciples woke Him up and demanded, "*Master, carest thou not that we perish?*" (Mark 4:38). Jesus then rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, "*Peace, be still*". Yes, He cares! "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). That single event – Jesus dying on the cross for us – is just as much a demonstration of God's love for us today as it has ever been. **John** referred to himself as "the one who Jesus loves". We can do the same today – each of us is also the one who Jesus loves.

A few of our members have died from Covid in the past year. As sad as that is, it's no sadder than the deaths of our members who died of other causes this past year. Or those

who died the year before or the year before that. In Acts 12, Herod wanted to strike against the church so *he killed James the brother of John with the sword* (Acts 12:2). That was obviously a sad time for the disciples of Jesus too. As much as we mourn the passing of each of our brothers and sisters, we know that the specific cause of death is not what's important but rather that we die faithful, ready to go to the paradise of God. It's how it's always been and how it always will be.

In the past year, we witnessed considerable protesting and rioting for various "causes". There have always been these types of causes and probably always will be. Some of these result in meaningful change whereas others just come and go. The one cause that has been around for the past 2000 years (in fact, even since creation) is the cause of Christ. It's the cause that we each stood up for on the day of our baptism and it's just as valid a cause for each of us today. **Simon Zelotes** (the zealot) was a man who involved himself in various causes of his day. However, when he met Jesus, he traded them all in and became a zealot for the cause of Christ – we can do the same today.

Many "leaders" emerged in the past year – in the political arena, in the medical field, among news reporters and even in the entertainment industry. Who of these should be our new leaders? None of them! Jesus Christ continues to be the only leader we should look to – the only other people we should consider following are those who are following Christ. At the time of John the Baptist, many were seeking the Messiah, wondering who it would be so they could follow Him. John told his followers how to recognize Him: "*Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon him...this is the Son of God*" (John 1:33-34). **Andrew**, who was one of John's followers at the time, witnessed the Spirit upon Jesus after His baptism – he spent time with Jesus and became convinced that He was the one to follow. The same Spirit will witness to us today how to recognize and follow Christ – we just need to listen to it.

In Matthew 16, Jesus explains that God reveals to individuals that Jesus is the Christ – it's not something that we are able to figure out for ourselves. **Peter** made the statement that Jesus was "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*" and Jesus immediately pointed out that "*flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 16:16-17). The Church of Jesus Christ has always relied on revelations from God to direct us – not only that Jesus is the Christ but also for the restoration of the gospel and many other things that God has revealed throughout the history of the Church. The revelation process did not halt in the past year – God shared valuable information with us regarding the sanctity of the Lord's Supper and becoming more united as the people of God.

Jesus said there would be division between people – He actually said that He came *to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother*, etc. (Matthew 10:35). But the division is not supposed to be between followers of Christ but rather between us and the unbelievers. Those who stand for Christ should be on one side of the divide while everyone else (commonly referred to as "the world") is on the other side of the divide. One of the Apostles, **Judas (not Iscariot)**, asked Jesus a question about what separates believers from unbelievers: *Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt*

manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (John 14:22). Jesus explained that the Holy Ghost would be given to the believers, thereby enabling them to have Christ with them while unbelievers do not. The best approach to dealing with all of the division we've seen in the past year is for all who have the Holy Ghost to follow its direction – this won't unite the world or the country but it will unite the Church as followers of Christ which is what God has always desired.

Judas Iscariot is an example of what happens when believers and unbelievers are mixed together. Judas was chosen to be one of the Twelve but *Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him* (John 6:64). Jesus referred to Judas as "unclean" and "a devil" – clearly, he didn't fit in with the other Apostles. Yet, the Twelve worked together as best they could for the time that Jesus was with them. Finally, the division became irreparable when Judas allowed Satan to enter into him (Luke 22:3) and he betrayed Christ. While there's nothing wrong with having relationships and alliances with people who don't share our belief in Christ, we have to understand that if we are true to our beliefs, the time may come when unbelievers will separate themselves from us, not desiring to be bound by the teachings of Christ that they don't believe in. When that happens, compromising our beliefs is not the answer but rather we need to continue to be united in Christ.

When the year 2020 came to an end, many people were more than happy to bid farewell to a terrible, godforsaken year. But was it a godforsaken year? Souls were called to repentance and baptism in 2020. The lame walked, the sick were healed, the unemployed got jobs and people who gathered together to worship the Lord experienced God's peace and protection. No, it was not a godforsaken year. God was at work in 2020 as in any other year – perhaps we just didn't hear enough about it. When we look at the list of Apostles in the four gospels, we see the name of **James, the son of Alphaeus**. We don't know much about this James as an individual but by reading about what the Apostles did, we can easily assume that James was an active worker for the Lord as well. Some people may think that James wasn't doing anything because we don't hear about it. Let's make sure that doesn't happen with God – He is still active on His throne and we need to share our testimonies to make sure everybody knows it.

When we see the evil that surrounds us today, it's easy to get down on people and not want to have anything to do with anyone beyond our own family and circle of friends. However, if we reach that point, we severely limit our ability to spread the gospel and grow the kingdom of God (which we are still called to do as members and ministry of The Church of Jesus Christ). Before meeting Jesus, the Apostle **Matthew** earned his living as a tax collector, forcing people to pay more than what they were supposed to and then keeping the extra for himself. No disciple of Jesus would have sought to be a friend of Matthew but Jesus approached him and said, "*Follow me*". Matthew then left behind his business and followed Jesus (Matthew 9:9). After that, Matthew hosted a feast at his house to allow his tax collector friends to meet Jesus and His disciples. Even people who think differently than we do need the Lord so let's continue to be open to sharing the gospel with others to grow the kingdom.

The Apostle **Philip** did something similar after meeting Jesus. He immediately went and found his friend Nathanael and said, “We have found him! The one who Moses and the prophets wrote about – Jesus of Nazareth!”. When Nathanael was not immediately receptive, Philip realized that words would not be enough to convince his friend so he finally just said, “*Come and see*”, and Nathanael was then introduced to Jesus (John 1:45-51). For a few months this past year, the entire Church was limited to virtual meetings in which we were only able to use words and computer images to convey the gospel. Although this was certainly better than nothing during a nationwide lockdown, we quickly realized that this could not become the “new normal” but that we needed to return to the traditional in-person meetings in which we could offer the Lord’s Supper and anointing of the sick as well as being able to invite others to “come and see” and experience the Spirit of God and the love of God among the people of God.

When Nathanael (also known as **Bartholomew**) met Jesus, he was surprised that Jesus recognized him as the man standing under a fig tree earlier in the day so he immediately acknowledged that Jesus must be the Son of God. We can envision Jesus perhaps smiling at this man’s simple, innocent faith and then replying, “*Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these*” (John 1:50). As much as a pandemic created by one virus has dominated the world’s focus for the past year, God’s mission today has not shifted to be the eradication of Covid. We’ll be happy when the virus is gone but even if it miraculously disappeared tomorrow, that would be minor compared to what God will be doing in the future. We look forward to seeing much greater things than that!

So, looking at the big picture, nothing has really changed. We are still the representatives of Jesus Christ, bringing His gospel to the world and taking on the opposition of the enemy. No different than at the time of the original Twelve Apostles or any other time in the history of the Church. The playing field may have changed a little and the enemy may have a few new weapons in his arsenal but “*greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*” (1 John 4:4). Fear not! Ultimate victory is assured so keep moving forward in the army of the true and living God!

May God bless you as you live for the Lord in this dispensation of time.

In the love of God,

The Quorum of Twelve Apostles

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