

## FROM A1

## PICTURING THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS TODAY

## ANDREW

His name is only mentioned a few times in the Gospels and always with an added description. One way or



Brittain

another, without fail, readers are reminded that Andrew is the brother of Simon Peter.

Thankfully, we encounter Andrews around us every day, only we rarely know their names. They are the ones who quietly make things happen.

We meet Andrews at church — usually in the hallways or back rooms rather than in the pulpit or in front of the class. Andrews stand in the parking lot to greet visitors. Andrews are assistant Sunday school teachers.

It was Andrew who brought his brother to Jesus. And, Andrew was the one who brought to Jesus the little boy who offered his five loaves and two fish so that thousands might be fed. The church needs lots and lots of Andrews — lots of people who quietly bring others to Jesus — lots of people who happily do their work in the shadows of another.

— The Rev. Jan Brittain, Christ United Methodist Church, Greensboro  
www.christgreensboro.org

## BARTHOLOMEW

People of today are very much like the people of Jesus' day. Consider one of Jesus' disciples with me,



Brown

Bartholomew; not much is written of him, but enough to see similarities in many of us to him. Many bible scholars believe that Bartholomew was the same person who in John's gospel is called Nathanael (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14). If this may be taken as true, Philip, having accepted Jesus, told Bartholomew that he had "found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth."

To his question, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip replied, "Come and see." His fastidious reluctance was much like others of today. Too often we are consumed by a belief that where you are born and who you are born to determine where you are going and who you will become. Many times God has taken what was considered nothing and made something out of it.

— The Rev. Cardes Brown, New Light Missionary Baptist Church, Greensboro  
www.nlmbc.com

## JAMES, SON OF ALPHEUS

I really have done little to deserve the name of "follower." Basically, I



Palmer

just make sure that we have the donuts ready for the prayer breakfasts and bread and cheese to hand out when the homeless people won't leave and Jesus invites them to stay for lunch.

Lately, Jesus has been talking about dying for justice and God's kingdom. I'm not interested in dying. I don't even have insurance, and my family can't pay for my funeral.

Jesus insists I'll be remembered. That may be good or bad. The other day he said, "James, you will be a great educator. I can see you putting your career on the line to do what's right for children. I can see you speaking out against resegregation; against suspending kids instead of helping them; against celebrating test scores and forgetting the whole child and the communities our schools are supposed to be serving." God bless me if Jesus is right. I've got my work cut out for me.

— The Rev. Maria Palmer, Iglesia Unida De Cristo (United Church of Christ), Chapel Hill

## JAMES, SON OF ZEBEDEE

There are hints in the Gospel stories that Papa Zebedee, the father of James and John, was a



Partington

man of means and had a well-established fishing business. Perhaps that kind of security impacts the Gospel stories about James? Those stories invite me to imagine a man who had a strong sense of self and who could be described as one without guile — direct, frank, not deceitful. Perhaps he had a temper? Or perhaps he was a person who moved with such a sure sense of disciple authority that he was impatient with those who resisted the new message? James was one of those inner circle people whose expectations for a permanent inner circle life were tempered by the Master. Legends abound! However, his being without guile led to his martyrdom. Who in my generation is one without guile? Who would be willing to be put at personal risk for the sake of a gospel? A few names come to mind: Desmond Tutu? Jim Wallis? Dorothy Day?

— David Partington, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Greensboro  
www.westpreschurch.org

## JOHN, SON OF ZEBEDEE

John began following Jesus as a young man, and he spent almost all of his long adult life as a Christian



McCullough

religious leader. From his Gospel and other writings, the rest of the New Testament and some notes from other early Church fathers, we could describe him this way:

- Strong personality (a "Son of Thunder;" ambitious, demanding and unyielding)

- Charismatic teacher in the Lord's inner circle of leaders, a "pillar of the Church"

- Repeatedly counseled Christians to love

- Twice survived attempts to kill him, and died, very old, in his bed

- Devoted to Jesus' mother, whom he took into his home

- Steeped in Jesus' real Presence Word and Sacrament (John 6) and the self-giving servant implications of that Eucharist (John 13).

He reminds me of a Christian leader today who has also taken the name "John."

— Jim McCullough, Our Lady of Grace, director of religious education, Greensboro  
www.olgchurch.org

## JUDAS

Judas was Jesus' disciple and close companion. He traveled with Jesus, supported Jesus, and I think it



Kroohs

is fair to assume Judas loved Jesus. So why did Judas betray Jesus?

Who in our society would fit the description of someone who is extremely close to Jesus, walks with Jesus, and then betrays Jesus for personal gain?

Certainly we can name various church leaders who have violated trust in ways which betray Jesus for personal gain. Or we can name others who may not so obviously betray Jesus, but do betray a trust given to them: business leaders who cheat stock holders, people who abuse or cheat on spouses. The list is long.

We all betray Jesus in our daily lives. The real question is, who is like Judas when we consider the entire story? Judas attempted to make restitution (Matthew 27). Is there anyone who has walked as closely with Jesus as Judas did, and then been willing to admit our failures?

— The Rev. Ken Kroohs, St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, High Point  
www.st-christopher.org



## MATTHEW

Matthew, a tax collector by trade, had the responsibility of charging the people taxes and was allowed



Johnson

to keep a significant portion back for himself. Matthew in our society would be likened unto America.

I will let you draw your own

inferences.

I think it important to note that after Matthew's commitment to follow Christ many of his tax buddies began to believe in Jesus (Mark 2:14-17). Imagine the impact we as a country could have on other tax collectors (countries) if we as a country followed God.

— The Rev. Marcus Johnson,  
Mount Zion Baptist Church, Greensboro  
[www.mtzbcc.com](http://www.mtzbcc.com)

## MORE ONLINE

For complete profiles, go to [www.news-record.com/news/local/disciples\\_032705.htm](http://www.news-record.com/news/local/disciples_032705.htm) or visit <http://blog.news-record.com/frontpew/>.

## PETER

Aye! You're looking at him! Peter's the name ...



Crofts

I guess life just got to me. One day fishing was good. Next day, it was awful. A wife prone to illness.

And then I met Jesus. His words came to me like sunrise on a dark ocean. He took to callin' me "Peter," which means "Rock." Was an ill-fitting name. But the longer I walked with Jesus the more I settled down strong and dependable.

Sure, I messed up a plenty. Even denied Jesus in His hardest night.

More's written 'bout me than any of the other disciples. I reckon God did that to show you there's hope for the likes of you.

— The Rev. Stephen M. Crofts,  
teaching pastor, Adams Farm  
Community Church, Jamestown, and  
director and minister at-large, The  
Carolina Study Center, Burlington  
[www.carolinastudycenter.com](http://www.carolinastudycenter.com)

## PHILIP

I saw Philip the other day. Didn't really stand out in the crowd, except when he served as a kind of middle-



Peoples

man between Jesus and others who needed something from Jesus. Toid Nathanael Jesus was the one, the real deal. Later on, he couldn't see

how in the world they were going to feed all those hungry people by the lakeshore. "Six months' wages would not be enough to feed this crowd." Yeah, that down-to-earth, take-things-at-face-value, call-it-like-you-see-it guy.

I spotted Philip recently at the garden store. He was that beautiful 5-year-old asking, "But Daddy, how do these seeds get to be lettuce? Tell me, Daddy, how?" I overheard Philip last week in the young woman quietly reading the psalms to her bed-ridden grandmother, helping the dying woman stay connected with her faith in a simple, loving way. Philip was that repair man who shared his faith and his love for people with me, not knowing I was having a tough day and needed to hear it.

— The Rev. Julie Peoples,  
Congregational United Church of  
Christ, Greensboro  
[www.congregationalucc.com](http://www.congregationalucc.com)

## SIMON, THE EAGER ONE

When Jesus chose disciples nearly 2,000 years ago, one was a zealot named Simon. The historian



Massey

Josephus uses the term zealot to describe Jews who resisted the Roman occupation during the war of AD 66-73. Zealots were more than willing

to use violence in pursuit of their political and religious goals.

If Jesus chose someone of similar political passion today, we would protest. Simon the Zealot today might be someone like Gerry Adams, a politician with ties to the Irish Republican Army. Jesus might choose someone like Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, a leader of Hezbollah. Jesus might call a well-known "hawk" in American government or the military.

But Jesus called Simon in spite of, not because of, his politics and violence. Jesus taught Simon a different kind of zeal. He taught him that the cross had greater power than the sword. Today, he teaches his disciples the same thing.

— The Rev. Ken Massey,  
First Baptist Church, Greensboro  
[www.fbcsgo.org](http://www.fbcsgo.org)

## THADDEUS

Somewhere out there is a friend of mine from high school. His name is Mike and I have no idea where he is,



Hutchinson

what he is doing, or what his life is like. All I know is that he is probably making a difference for Christ somewhere in this world. I know this

because even in high school, he lived out his faith in practical ways to the rest of us.

Thaddeus was a disciple of Jesus who is only mentioned in the Bible within a list of the disciples of Jesus. The Bible doesn't tell us where he went or what happened to him.

It is pure conjecture on my part, but I would like to think that since Thaddeus was a disciple of Jesus, he went out into the world and made a difference. His life and ministry may not have been recorded into the biblical record, but who really cares if that is the case? After all, most of what the Spirit of the Living Christ has done and is doing in this world is not written about, recorded onto video tape, or handed down in story and lore to our children.

— The Rev. Rob Hutchinson,  
FaithWalk United Methodist Church,  
Whitsett  
[www.faihwalkumc.org](http://www.faihwalkumc.org)

## THOMAS

I really like Thomas ... and so will you. But not if we keep believing his bad press.



Miller

Every other disciple fled, afraid for his life. None of the other disciples believed Jesus was alive ... until they first saw him.

Yet historically, Thomas wears the label.

But here's the good news. That's not how Jesus saw Thomas. While others saw Thomas' pessimism, Jesus saw his courage. Others only heard his questions. Jesus observed his honesty. Most saw outward doubt, Jesus perceived Thomas' inward love.

He knew what set Thomas apart from the others was not that his doubt was greater, but that his sorrow was greater. No one could feel the way Thomas felt unless he loved Jesus the way Thomas loved him.

When the risen Jesus appeared to Thomas there were no harsh words. No labels. As a result, Thomas responded, "My Lord and my God."

— The Rev. Don Miller, Westover Church,  
Greensboro, [www.westoverchurch.com](http://www.westoverchurch.com)

# Disciples we don't know are most important

By REV. MONICA A. COLEMAN  
Special to the News & Record

## COMMENTARY

Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddeus, Simon, Judas. These are "the Twelve." This is how they are listed in the books of Matthew, Mark and Acts. This is how they appear in both the European and Afrocentric versions of that "Last Supper" painting with Jesus in the middle, and the 12 men flanking him on his right and left.

We often think of these disciples as models or examples of who we are as followers of Jesus, or sometimes as the people we don't want to be. Sometimes we even think of these 12 as representing parts of our individual personalities. And so these 12 have become special to us. The "apostles." Jesus' "true friends." They are the only people who have been with Jesus all the way. Or are they?

In Acts 1, the 11 disciples (minus Judas Iscariot) find themselves in a quandary after Jesus' ascension. They need another to take Judas' position. At that point, we discover that there were others who had been with Jesus from the beginning — "from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us" reads verse 22. The 11 propose two men, and after casting lots, choose Matthias. Well, wait a minute — I thought there were only 12. Apparently there were more. Apparently, there were

at least 13. These are the disciples we don't know. They were almost left out of the tradition.

I'm forced to think: Well, who else didn't make it in the story? Who else was left out? From the gospel accounts, we know that Jesus specialized in including the excluded. He cared about those whom other people left out. He touched the lepers, fellowshiped with tax collectors, broke bread with his betrayers, spoke to the "demon-possessed" and sat with women. These may have been the other disciples we don't

know.

This changes the way we look at our faith communities and ourselves. There are, among us, disciples we don't acknowledge. And they are probably those that our culture tends to leave out: gays and lesbians, the poor, children, people living with physical and mental challenges, people living in third-world countries, the uneducated, the homeless, the list could go on and on.

Easter challenges us to speak and preach that Jesus came for all of us. Easter sug-

gests we not wait until the return of Christ to pay attention to the silenced and disremembered.

Easter challenges us to bring the disciples we don't know back into our traditions.

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