

“The Weakest Link”
Mark 3:7-19, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
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A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

This year, the NHL announced that for the first time in over a decade, professional hockey players would be allowed to play in the winter Olympics in 2026. And immediately, everyone started speculating on who would play for Team Canada, which best of the best all-stars would represent our country. We’d have the best forwards – Connor McDavid, Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon, Connor Bedard. We’d have the best defensemen – Cale Makar, Shea Theodore, Dougie Hamilton. And in goal, we’ll have ... well, somebody. The days when Canada had the best goalies in the world are long, long gone – they’ve all retired - Brodeur, Roy, Luongo and Price are golfing and coaching, not playing any more. The best we can hope for is career back-ups and journeymen like Adin Hill and Tristan Jarry, and if you’ve never heard of Adin Hill and Tristan Jarry, that’s exactly the point. For all the amazing players Canada can put on their team, it’s going to be hard to win gold without an all-star goaltender in net. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, a team is only as strong as its weakest player, and if that weak link is your goaltender, you might be in trouble.

And maybe you had the same thought when hearing today’s passage from the gospel of Mark. Here Jesus is putting together his dream team, the twelve all-star disciples who are going to follow him all the way to Jerusalem, the best of the best who will one day become the foundation for his church. These are people who you name churches and hospitals after, these are names you give your children, these are all-stars, heroes of the faith whose stories have been told and retold, passed down through the centuries, the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Centering our first line, we’ve got our captain and leading scorer, Simon Peter, and on his wings we’ve got the best brothers since the Sedin twins, the Sons of

Thunder, James and John. On defence we've got Andrew and Philip, we've got scoring support from Matthew and Bartholomew, a great grinding fourth line from Thomas, Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot. What a team! They're going to be unstoppable! And who do we have playing goal? Why, it's Judas! Judas Iscariot. The man who will sell Jesus to his enemies for thirty pieces of silver, the man who will betray everything he claimed to believe in for a little easy profit, the man who will lead the soldiers to Jesus and mark him with a kiss, that Judas Iscariot is one of the twelve disciples Jesus appoints to be with him, to go and preach about his kingdom, to have authority over all the powers of evil in the world. If a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, then this chain has a fatal flaw. And it's reasonable to wonder why. Why did Jesus pick Judas? Why make him one of the twelve? Why make him part of the inner circle, why give him all this power and authority when you already knew he was going to use it to try and destroy you? Why does this chain have such a weak link?

The thing we have to realize though, is that the idea that the twelve disciples are eleven all-stars and one bad apple, eleven perfect followers and one weak link, that's not really accurate. That's not actually true. If you read all the way through the gospel of Mark, you'll find that the twelve disciples didn't have one weak link. They had twelve. See, in those days there were a lot of charismatic preachers travelling around Galilee and Judea, building up a following among the local communities, and usually when those preachers wanted to get organized and build their movement beyond just their local hometown, they would go to the synagogues and recruit the best students they could find to be their disciples, their inner circle. They would find the straight-A students who had mastered Hebrew and Greek and Aramaic, who had memorized the Torah cover to cover and could recite it backwards and forwards, the best preachers, the most determined followers, the best of the best. But if you weren't one of those all-star students good enough to be called by a master teacher, you couldn't just hang out in the synagogue, hoping someone with lower standards would eventually come along and pick you. You'd have to face facts and give up on your dream of being somebody important, go back to ordinary life with an ordinary

job, like fishing or farming. Or, God forbid, tax collecting. And of course, those are the people Jesus chose to be his twelve, his inner circle – twelve men who had already tried to be great, and failed, who had tried to make it to the big leagues and had to crawl back to a steady paycheck on dad's fishing boat. These twelve apostles were not all-stars, champions, the best of the best. They were all failures. They were all weak links.

And maybe you're thinking, well, maybe they were great, but they were just unlucky – maybe nobody gave them a chance, but Jesus saw their true potential and called them to greatness, and they flourished once he called them to follow. The thing is, again, that's not really true. If you keep reading through the rest of the gospel of Mark, you'll see that these twelve men are really not very good at being disciples. They are bad at, like, everything. Again and again throughout the gospel of Mark, they fail, at every responsibility Jesus gives them. They miss the point of every parable. They can't pull off the simplest miracles. They are constantly getting in silly arguments with each other. They never listen to a word Jesus says. And by the end of the story, it isn't just Judas who fails Jesus. It isn't just Judas who betrays him, denies him, abandons him. They all do. When Jesus is arrested, every single one of these twelve so-called heroes run for the hills to save their own skins and leave Jesus to die. At the end of the gospel of Mark, every single one of these twelve disciples has abandoned Jesus, they're all still in hiding, with no idea that Jesus has come back to life, even though he told them repeatedly exactly what was going to happen. And that shouldn't really come as a surprise. These twelve men had already demonstrated that they didn't have what it takes to be great, to be all-stars, the best of the best, and Jesus picked them anyway, so he can't be surprised when they fail, when they fall short, when they keep messing up over and over again.

And of course, Jesus isn't surprised. In fact, that's exactly what he wanted. See, all the way through the Bible, God has a habit of picking the most unlikely people to be the official representatives for the kingdom of heaven on earth. God doesn't like to use all-stars, the best of the best, to accomplish the work that

needs doing on earth. God likes finding weak links, the folks who are never anyone's first or second or even third choices, and calling them to accomplish incredible, spectacular, unbelievable things in the name of the kingdom of heaven. All the way through the Bible, it's always the ones you least expect who end up doing the most unexpected things for God's kingdom, again and again and again, it's the weak who bring in the kingdom, it's the weak who speak the word of the Lord, it's the weak who proclaim that the King of Kings has arrived. That's how God always worked, so that's how Jesus works too. Jesus calls these twelve misfits to follow him, not in spite of their weakness but because of it – and when they mess up, he forgives them and picks them back up and calls them again to do the work they've been given. By the end of the gospel of Mark, they're still misfits. They're still a mess. But they don't stay that way, because Jesus doesn't leave them that way. He keeps calling them, keeps sending them, keeps working in them and through them until they become more than just misfits, they become apostles, sent out to proclaim the kingdom for the Son of God, to speak the word of the Lord, to build the church of Jesus Christ all over the world.

That's how God has always worked. And that's how God still works. God's grace and power work best in human weakness, in people who don't look like much, don't sound like much, people who tend to get their foot caught in their mouth every so often, people who aren't quite sure what God was thinking when calling them. People like us. The church today may not seem like much. We're just ordinary folks, trying our best in a weird and mixed-up world, trying to love the way Jesus loved us, trying to share what we've been given with the people around us, and it's hard, and it's painful, and it's frustrating, because we are weak. And that's okay. That's the way it's always been. But we don't have to worry, because it's not up to us. The same voice that called Peter and James and Andrew and John, who took those misfits and used them to change the world, took those weak links and made them strong, that voice is calling us. The same Spirit that worked in those twelve apostles to change the world forever, that Spirit is at work in us, here and now, and that means that we are capable of more than we seem. And we will still mess up, thinking we need to be strong, we need

to get things right, as if the success or failure of our families, our church or the whole world is all up to us, our wisdom and courage and strength, and then we start looking at the people around us as if they're the weak links, they're the problem keeping us from getting God's work done, when the truth is we're all weak links. There will be days where we deny our calling, where we pretend we don't even know who Jesus is, where we choose the easy comfortable path instead of following him to the cross. There will be days where through our words, our actions, and our inactions we betray the one who died for us. We're still misfits. We're still a mess. But we don't stay that way, because Jesus doesn't leave us that way. Jesus Christ is always with us, and Jesus Christ is strong, his power is made perfect in our weakness, because when we are weak, Jesus Christ is strong. The chain we are part of isn't defined by our weakness, it's defined by his strength – it doesn't matter how weak the weakest link is, because Jesus is strong enough to hold all of us together, to take the weakest, most insignificant disciples and use them to change the world. The one who called Peter and James and John and even Judas, Jesus Christ is calling us, sending us, working in us and through us until we become more than just weak links, we become apostles, sent out to proclaim the kingdom for the Son of God, to speak the word of the Lord, to build the church of Jesus Christ all over the world. That's the work we've been given. That's the work Jesus Christ is going to accomplish, working in us. Today and everyday, may God's power be made perfect in our weakness, as apostles of Jesus Christ, sent out into his world to share his love, so the world will know who he is and what he can accomplish in this world, in every human heart. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!