

## Reflection by David Kennedy

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. <sup>2</sup>These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee and his brother John; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Cananaean and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.<sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not take a road leading to gentiles, and do not enter a Samaritan town, <sup>6</sup>but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'

*Matthew 10. 1-7*

My grandmother used to love Variety shows. When she went on holiday, she would go to the Variety shows in the great Seaside Resort theatres. The annual Royal Variety show at the London Palladium was a must-watch programme on the tele. And I recall her telling me that one of her favourite acts was *The Crazy Gang* of Bud Flanagan, Chesney Allen, Jimmy Nero, Teddy Knox, Charlie Naughton and Jimmy Gold. The humour, the slap-stick, the timing, the madness – she loved it.

*The Crazy Gang* would not be an inappropriate name for Jesus' twelve disciples. Just think of what we know of them. Peter, the leader was headstrong, passionate, impulsive, whole-hearted, a man who could reach the highest heights and then come crashing down like a ton of bricks. Jesus called the brothers James and John *Boanerges* or 'Sons of Thunder'. What lies behind that nick-name I wonder? *Boan* means 'sons of' and *erges* could mean noise, commotion, agitation, quaking thunder. Were they like bulls in a china shop, firebrands, noisy, or did they have bad tempers, flying off the handle? With a name like *Boanerges* they could hardly be meek and mild. And then we have Matthew, who had a past. He was a tax collector, a Jew who sold out to the occupying Romans for a quick buck. Tax Collectors were collaborators, and often dishonest; they would fleece their own people and they were despised. Yet, Matthew was now in the Crazy Gang. And by contrast, we also have Simon; in Luke's Gospel he is called a Zealot. Zealots were Jewish revolutionaries, the first century equivalent of the French Resistance. Many zealots took up arms and encouraged violent rebellion against the Romans. How extraordinary to find Matthew and Simon in the same group, because ordinarily they would have been the deepest of enemies. And we have Thaddaeus – many people identify him with the disciple called Nathaniel in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus called him – 'an Israelite in whom there is no guile'. We can think of him as straight-taking, receptive, perhaps the joker in the pack. And Judas Iscariot, perhaps the quiet one, the one in the background, the one who is difficult to read, to get to know, to trust, perhaps the odd-man out.

This is just some of the Twelve that Jesus chose as his closest companions. What an extraordinary group of men; this was his Crazy Gang. These are the ones he sent out to spread his message. In all their diversity of temperament and background, somehow Jesus brought them together.

And here we are – the Crazy Gang of St Andrew's, Corbridge in all our diversity and difference; with our personalities and foibles; our contradictions, and temperaments.

And we still follow the Galilean from Nazareth, and we're daft enough to believe that service comes before self; that the first will be last and the last will be first, that the greatest glory is to choose the way of self-sacrifice, that it is in giving that we receive, and in dying that we are born to eternal life. That true joy and happiness come not from wealth or status, but in seeking the Father's will and knowing the Father's love; that the greatest demonstration of God's love is a cross with all its shame and suffering?

And even if sometimes the Church gets caught up in its own slap-stick and madness and even come close to a farce, we still are called by Jesus to stick it out, unite around him, and someone get along with each other. And, of course, variety is the spice of life. Today Jesus chose his Crazy Gang; and here we are as their successors. And we wouldn't have it any other way.