

***Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen...”***

It is the classic example of childhood angst: choosing teams for some Phys. Ed. game. And at the risk of bringing up some painful memories, you probably know exactly what I mean...the teacher appoints two captains who quickly pick their closest friends. Then the captains and their friends openly discuss who would be most helpful to winning of those who are left...and who wouldn't...and choosing accordingly. Finally, deals start getting made over who has to take the last kids on their team as liabilities. And through it all, one can witness everything from psychological tendencies to social norms to stereotypical profiling. It is a petri dish of human choice and behavior. And its just about being chosen to *play*...a game, let alone chosen to *serve*...in ministry.

Like in our text for today from the Acts of the Apostles. Luke, the inspired author, begins this account of choosing to *serve* with three words to set the stage: ***In those days***. We’re talking about the 10 days between Jesus’ ascension into heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. These were days of angst, days of uncertainty, days of anticipation, and yes, even days of fear. Sure, Jesus had left the disciples with incredible training, eye-witness observances of the miraculous, clear direction, and promised power to put it all to work in the harvest field of lost souls. Good times!

But, until that promised power of the Spirit was given, there were a few questions to be answered, a few doubts to be assuaged, a few misunderstandings to correct, and as we find in our text for this festival Sunday, a few organizational holes to fill.

***Peter stood up among the brothers and said, “Gentlemen, brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David about Judas, who became***

***a guide for those who arrested Jesus. Judas was counted as one of us and was given a share in this ministry...Indeed, it is written in the book of Psalms: let someone else take his position.”*** In the interest of time today, we are going to keep our focus on Matthias as Judas’ replacement rather than take time to go into the, well, *gory* details of what happened to Judas. Suffice it to say, Judas was dead at his own hand, choosing a path of his own making, while fulfilling a prophesy of his betrayal, and leaving a vacancy among the disciples.

It is during these *days* of anticipation that quick-acting Peter takes the initiative to address a need and fill the vacancy. Peter had no specific role to lead. In fact, neither he nor the 11 other disciples tried to select someone on their own, like they were exercising authority within some self-appointed hierarchy. They met with a group of about 120 and, pointing to Psalm 109:8 for support, they proposed to fill the role from among the group.

Peter started the process of choosing someone to serve, ***“Therefore it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us during the entire time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from his baptism by John until the day Jesus was taken up from us, become a witness with us of his resurrection.”*** In other words, the same qualifications for the new replacement disciple were the same as the the rest of the disciples. Jesus had graciously assigned this apostolic ministry to the them and they were intent to carry it out, complete in number. But, note how Peter emphasizes not the apostolic *status*, but the apostolic *service* for which the replacement disciple would be chosen. The time with Jesus, the instruction from Jesus, the experiences with Jesus, the eyewitness accounts of Jesus would all be necessary to the new disciple in the coming years as one testifying to the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord Jesus to the world.

So who would it be? You can almost see Peter scanning the group, quietly talking with James and John, assessing and evaluating, narrowing down the list. You

can almost see it, right? Almost like choosing teams for Phys. Ed.?

I wonder how many thought to themselves, "It should be me. I should be the one chosen." Or how many others thought, "I hope that they don't choose me. I don't want to do it." Or still others may have thought, "The disciples will do whatever they want, anyway. It doesn't matter what I think." Maybe some were resentful because they felt entitled to serve, but they assumed that the qualifications and the system were "rigged" against them. And maybe some felt more deserving of greater honor. And maybe some felt ill-treated by others and would have been all set to refuse if chosen. There may have even been a few who felt that they had done enough already, and it was time for someone else to serve.

It would be easy to think all of that, wouldn't it, especially considering our own experiences with choosing and service in the church? How easy it is to let circumstances and attitudes and feelings and wrongs keep us focused on *who* rather than on *what*, keep us focused on *status* rather than on *service*. Yes, we can be too busy asking, "Don't you know who I am?" to be asking "How can I serve?"

No, our *attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.* (Philippians 2:5-7) Never once did Jesus use his status to force people to do his will. Rather, he used his service to win people to his will through law and gospel, through love and truth, through patience and understanding, through instruction and influence, through sacrifice and triumph. For *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*, including you and including me and including the 120 gathered that day in Jerusalem.

*They*, we're told, *proposed two* names for consideration as servants of Christ: *Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have*

*chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place." Then they assigned lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias.*

While we don't know for sure how the lot was cast, it was common, and the Greek would support, that the names would have been written on two tiles or shards of pottery, tossed around in a jar, and the first to pop out was the one chosen to serve. And no one had a problem with it, knowing well the Proverb *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*

*(16:33) The lot fell to Matthias. So he was counted with the eleven apostles.*

We are blessed today to install our congregational Elders and members of the Board for Lay Ministry for the coming year. Chosen to serve, they will give of their time and talents to serve this congregation and our community. They have been *proposed* and chosen to serve in leadership roles for the spiritual welfare and public ministry of this congregation. In humbleness, gentleness, and firmness, they are to serve alongside and guiding the rest of us in our various roles and functions: organizers, coordinators, teachers, servers, helpers, preachers, counselors, evangelizers, fixers, and a host of others. All of us, the whole list, *...a chosen people...liv[ing] as servants of God.* (1 Peter 2:2,16) This is what we not only celebrate on this Festival of St Matthias, but we also imitate this day and every day in service to the Lord and his Kingdom work – different gifts, different roles, different opportunities, yet all of us chosen to serve as a grace given to each of us through Christ.

It is interesting to note that after Matthias is chosen, just like Joseph Barsabbas, most of the other 11 disciples, the 120 gathered, even the 3000 that would be chosen on Pentecost only days later, Matthias is never heard from again. The Lord Jesus used him, and them, and others, and you and me, to spread his Good News to the ends of the earth, calling the lost, and serving our Lord. Its about the service, not the status when you're chosen to serve. God bless your service in his Kingdom to the glory of his name. Amen.