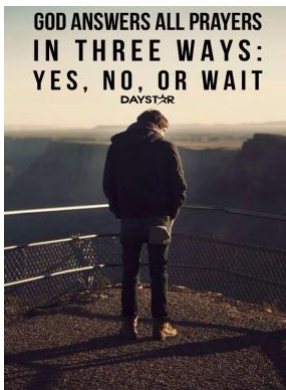


**"Acts of the Apostles: Lesson 3" by
Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist
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"Preparing for Pentecost"



In the last couple of weeks, we have looked at the earliest days of the Church. We learned that the physician, Dr. Luke, wrote both the gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Last week we studied Acts 1:1-11, and today we will examine verses 12 through the end of chapter one.



As we read Luke's gospel account two weeks ago, we witnessed the immediate events after the resurrection of Jesus. We observed that sometimes we have to wait on the promises of the Father. Jesus told his followers to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. But, what were they supposed to be doing while they waited? When we pray, sometimes we get an immediate "yes." Sometimes we get an immediate "no." But more often than both, we get a "wait." What should we be doing in those times of waiting?

The text this morning suggests that during those times we should gather with other believers, spend time in prayer, and be about the normal business that God calls us each to do. That is what the small band of Christ-Followers did in the wake of the resurrection. Stand with me as we read the first portion of today's scripture.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. (Acts 1:12-14, ESV).



Luke starts by telling us that after Christ's resurrection the group came back from the Mount of Olives to the upper room. Luke is specific and tells us that it is a "Sabbath day's journey." I thought that was interesting because it is a measurement of distance. The rabbis and sages had defined the permitted distance to walk on the Sabbath as being approximately a half mile. Olivet is just across the Kidron Valley from the Temple Mount.

The group came down from Bethany (Mt. of Olives), crossed the Kidron, and made their way to the upper room. Some church tradition has led scholars to believe that the "upper room" belonged to the mother of John-Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark.

Not all houses had upper rooms. Most of that area of Jerusalem had small tenement apartment-type dwellings. However, some of the larger houses had "upper rooms." They were roomy and were used for such things as council meetings and synagogues; and they were used as places of worship by early Christians. Whoever this upper room belonged to really isn't important, but it is important who was there. Luke tells us that the remaining eleven disciples all met there along with Mary, the mother of Jesus, the faithful women who stayed with Him through it all, and the immediate family of Jesus.



The text tells us that they were "all of one accord." It also tells us that those women who were there at the foot of the cross until Jesus was taken down, and those same faithful women who were there on Sunday morning (resurrection morning) were right there with the disciples devoting themselves to prayer and waiting on the next move of God. Being of "one accord" means they were united in their hearts. We too should have one heart and

be in agreement and harmony with one another in our Church. When we are in harmony with each other we are making a sweet sound before the Lord. Let's read on.

¹⁵ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, ¹⁶ "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; ¹⁷ for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." ¹⁸ (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

²⁰ "For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.' (Acts 1:15-20, NKJV).

Several days into the waiting, Peter stood up in the midst of the 120. Often in Greco-Roman literature the first person listed was a person of importance. Peter was immediately a leader figure to this group of followers who had been faithful to the teachings of Jesus. I think it's interesting that he wasn't elected, rather God ordained Peter in this leadership role. I think it is also interesting that the church at this moment in time numbered one hundred and twenty. That was the same number required to establish a court of justice in a village in ancient Israel. It was of number of completeness to constitute a community. Peter was ready to talk about the "elephant in the room," the betrayal of Judas Iscariot. This was the first crisis the church was to encounter.



It is important to appreciate that in the wake of the great disappointment of the betrayal by Judas, the group didn't fall apart. Often in church settings, a leader or important person will disappoint in some way, leading to a crisis in the group. Often one member will wound another member emotionally. We've all heard of the pastor who ran off with the secretary, or the music minister who had an affair with the Sunday School teacher.

We've even heard of the treasurer who decides to steal from the congregation to line his or her own pockets. These events of betrayal often lead to great offense and disappointment that wounds the church deeply. Taking "offense" is the great bait of Satan. It drives more people from the church than probably anything else. We should be on our guard from ever being easily offended by our brothers and sisters in the Lord. The members of that first church could have all been so disappointed in Judas that they just gave up on the whole thing then and there. However, that didn't happen to this group. They met. They prayed. And Peter dealt with the problem of Judas.



Peter reminded the group that Judas wasn't merely a sheep that had minimally strayed; rather he was a traitor, and being a traitor in ancient Israel called for harsh and swift judgment. Peter reminded the group that God had exacted this sentencing and judgment on Judas. Other scriptures tell us that Judas went and hung himself, but apparently it was a very messy hanging. Greco-Roman writings tell us that a botched suicide further accentuated the ineptitude of

the person trying to kill himself or herself. To harmonize this account with the gospel accounts, it seems clear that upon hanging himself either the rope broke, breaking him open on the stones of the field or he swung into a tree disemboweling himself, causing his "entrails to gush out." Whatever happened, it was bloody and people talked about it. They talked about it so much they referred to the locale as *Akel Dama*, the field of blood.

Peter then quotes a passage from the Book of Psalms (109:8) to scripturally support what he is saying: *'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.'* I'm not sure whether this prophecy was specifically about Judas but Peter used the scripture to explain the event, comfort the group, and give direction on how to move forward. That is exactly how we use scripture today to help us in whatever situation we might find ourselves. It was in making the suggestion to "let another take his [Judas'] office" that Peter directs the disciples to the task of replacing Judas as one of the twelve.

The Blessed Number 12

- 12 represents the OLD Testament Church
 - 12 Tribes of God's chosen people (Israel)
- 12 also represents the NEW Testament Church
 - 12 Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ also called Apostles



Some may ask why the disciples had to replace Judas at all. What is so special about twelve? It is a very good question that is not easily answered. Some scholars believe that the Twelve Tribes of Israel always indicated a "righteous remnant." From the earliest days of Judaism a cited number of leadership is the number twelve. The Essene community in Qumran was ruled by twelve. The twelve tribes represent the physical foundation of Israel, while the twelve disciples

represent perhaps the spiritual foundation of God's work on earth. As a personal observation, I have served on quite a few boards and twelve seems to be a good number of people that usually represent a broad spectrum of ideas while being a small enough group to be manageable. Such a group is able to become cohesive and has the ability to coalesce behind a common thought, idea, or direction. Peter sets forth the criteria concerning the replacement. Please pick up with verse 21.

²¹ “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

²³ And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:21-26, NKJV).



Peter established some general qualifications to be a replacement apostle. He says that the person should have been with the group from the beginning, from the moment of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, and that person must be someone who had travelled the distance with Jesus and the disciples. The replacement should be one who likewise was a witness to the resurrection. The group proffered two such men: Justus and Matthias. It should be noted that both men were qualified and would be the kind of men who could step into the ministry of Apostle. I think it is notable that although these two were imminently qualified, they had never complained, or politicked to become one of the original twelve. The meaning of their names reflects their character. "Justus" means "right," "just," or "upright;" and "Matthias" means "gift from God." Both of these men were precious brothers in the faith who were upright and really were just and righteous gifts by God to His nascent church.

Looking for God's will in the matter, they chose the replacement by lots. The lots were not used to decide some moral decision, but rather to pick between two pre-qualified candidates. At this time in first century Palestine, lots were used to decide which general was to go into battle, which battles were to be fought et cetera. I don't think this is a practice by which we should choose governance in the church of today, but we can appreciate the sincerity of the group and their zeal to know the will of God and to do it. In the end, God's replacement of Judas, Matthias, was a "gift from God" in every way.



The text shows us that there was no jealousy or friction by the decision. Justus probably received the news joyfully and figured God had another role for him in the Church. It is important for a Church body to work in sweet unity, praying that the pastors/bishops/elders of the Church will make wise and godly decisions regarding sensing God's direction and calling on the various members of any church body. I never sought to become pastor of Union Grove and neither Ward nor Jimmy sought to become our first deacons. The Lord first called me by whispering in my heart His call on my life, through your prayers and affirmation, and through your conviction that I was God's man for this body for this season.

We have all witnessed others in this church body who have specific roles that came about through God's calling and subsequent equipping. Let's be mindful to pray that we will stay forever right in the center of God's will for this little church in the grove. So in summary, here are a few lessons I think we can take out of this biblical account today.

1. Jesus told His followers to wait in Jerusalem until they received the "promise of the Father," the Holy Spirit.
 - a. They obeyed Him and went to Jerusalem. We should obey what He tells us to do.
 - b. They had to WAIT to receive the promise of the Father. We also often have to wait to receive the promises of the Father.
 - c. While waiting, Jesus' followers met in one accord and devoted themselves to prayer. We too should strive to stay in harmony with one another and we should prioritize praying together regularly.
2. Peter explained the cause and effect of Judas' betrayal of Jesus. He reminded the group of God's sovereignty in the crisis situation by directing and pointing them to scripture that made sense out of the wound they had all experienced.
 - a. He reminded them to keep their eyes on what God was doing. He didn't focus on the failings of Judas. Likewise our walk with Christ shouldn't be dependent on the pastor, deacons, or other church leaders. Leaders will always disappoint you in some way. I hope I'll never fail you, but I am sure I'll disappoint you in some way. Make sure your relationship is grounded and rooted in a relationship with Jesus.
 - b. The followers didn't focus on the failure. They put the failure of Judas behind them and didn't engage in being angry at him. They didn't focus on the hurt they had felt. They looked to the future and to what God was going to do in and through them.
3. Lastly, they believed that God would make perfect provision for the deep hole left in their leadership by Judas' betrayal, and God performed. God did not fail them.

The church was only days old when it dealt with its first challenge. And it did so by meeting together and lifting up the situation to the Father. Those early Christians believed that God is Who He says He is, and that He will do what He says He will do. They moved forward, fully believing that the Father would baptize them with the Holy Spirit on the promised day of Pentecost. They spent their time waiting by being spiritually productive. Let us each go and do likewise.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868.
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