

King of Glory Lutheran Church

May 15/16, 2021

Year B: 7th Sunday of Easter: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 & John 17:6-19

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Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, ¹⁶“Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus—¹⁷for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us— one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” ²³So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

John 17:6-19

⁶ I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher said, “Change is the only constant in life.”

Don't we know it.

Change is definitely a constant part of life. The seasons change. Even within a season like spring there is constant change. There are warm days and cold days. There are rainy days and snowy days. Plants and trees grow and change and need tending.

This month school is finishing up for children, youth, young adults and staff after another challenging year with COVID protocols and a lot of uncertainty. Students are graduating after many years of study and hard work.

Summer is coming and with it there will be camps and sports and vacations and hopefully new opportunities for fellowship, service and fun. Some of our schedules will change for a season until the next one begins.

I've been thinking about change this week in part because of what is going on in our community but also because it is one of the themes of our readings for this weekend.

In our reading today from the book of Acts we meet Peter speaking in front of 120 people. He puts before them the need to replace the spot Judas has left open. The group of disciples Jesus had gathered together has changed. Judas betrayed Jesus and so now there are 11 instead of 12 disciples on the leadership team. At this point Jesus has ascended to heaven after his resurrection and left his followers to carry on his ministry. And now it is left to the disciples to decide who will take Judas' place.

I'm going to take a chance and guess that this story is probably not in your top 10 best known Bible stories so let's review what is happening here.

Peter says that Jesus' followers need to choose someone who has been with them from the beginning. Someone who was there at Jesus' baptism. Someone who knew Jesus. Someone who had been a witness to Jesus' ministry, preaching and teaching. Someone who witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection.

Two people are nominated. Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. Both men, we can assume, met the requirements for the job. Then the group assembled prayed and asked for Jesus to show them who should be called.

And as was their practice they cast lots. We don't know exactly how they “cast lots” but they probably used a dice or a stone, similar to a coin toss for us today. And by this process of discernment and prayer Matthias was chosen.

This story we hear today that shows the disciples working together through this time of incredible change is important for us to know and learn from.

Jerusha Matsen Neal, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Duke University Divinity School writes that these verses *“show a church grappling with the what, why, and how of communal life in light of Jesus’ bodily absence. Even in these early, pre-Pentecost days, Peter has a sense of purpose. The role of the early church is to live into this “witness” vocation, even at the cost of its life. The replacement of Judas, therefore, is not primarily about the church’s self-maintenance. It is about the church’s urgent need to be witnesses to Jesus’ risen person.”*

Let me just repeat what Professor Neal said, “Peter has a sense of purpose.”

Sometimes when we are going through change we become overwhelmed and lost. I’m sure Peter experienced that as well. He must have felt overwhelmed and lost after Jesus’ death. But after some time to pray and discern God’s mission, today he knows what he is about. He knows the purpose of the church. And the purpose wasn’t about filling an empty spot that needed someone with a pulse. The purpose was to continue to witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

And it wasn’t just Peter who had a sense of purpose. The people gathered there together in Acts 1 who made up the early church, understood that God had brought them together for a purpose and would lead them forward. They remembered what Jesus taught them and showed them. How he opened up the scriptures for them. How he forgave and healed and served and prayed. And they did what Jesus did.

Professor Neal writes that, *“Discernment in a community is no easy thing, but this passage gives us a snapshot of a particular community doing that brave, provisional work in a particularly fraught time. The community leans into its trust of God’s goodness. They search the scriptures, and they commit to communal practices of prayer. To follow the example of the early church is not to commit to a rigid practice of decision making or a particular structure. It is to recognize our own need to lean on divine guidance, to trust God’s ability to speak, and to faithfully act in response.”*

I said earlier that change is a theme that runs through our readings today. But so is prayer and purpose.

In our gospel reading from John, Jesus prays for his disciples and speaks of them being sent out into the world. He speaks and prays in a moment of change. Scary, overwhelming, exciting change.

And even as Jesus acknowledges all that is about to change, he gives the assurance of what will not change. God’s love and God’s presence and God’s guidance will never change. God is always with us because we belong to God and God will never let us go. That will never change.

We gather together today as people who know that change is a constant part of life. But it is not the only, and certainly not the most important, thing that is constant for us.

In times of change and transition, whether because of a season, a graduation or a pandemic, we know that God is always with us. And God has given us the wisdom and guidance and strength to continue God's work and know our purpose.

The process the disciples follow as they carry on Jesus' ministry is an example for us. When we find ourselves faced with change we need to slow down and take time for discernment. We need to gather together to remember our sense of purpose. And we need to pray for God's guidance and trust that God will be with us through all that is changing and into the future.

As a community we might find ourselves in vigorous debate or quiet discussions. And God will be with us in our discernment as a community of where we are called to share the good news and continue Jesus' ministry. In all the changes we face as a community, as a congregation and as individuals we are reminded today to take time to listen for God's voice, watch for the power of the Holy Spirit and learn from Jesus to pray and trust.

Please pray with me now: *O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.