



Sunday, July 16, 2023

Speaker: John VanderWindt

Scripture: Acts 1:12-26

Sermon Title: Our Prayers – God’s Calling

Thank you Kaes [Vanderkooy.] Prayer is an essential part of who the church is. We will see that again today as we continue in our study of Acts, looking at what it means to be the church and what we can learn from the early church. The first church that was formed after Christ rose and the disciples, who became apostles, became members of the church. So today, we're going to read from **Acts 1:12-26**. We will read till the end of the chapter.

This is an interesting passage. It gives us some insights as to the essentials of the early church which need to be also the essentials of our church. Yet it also gives us insight into the transition of leaders in the church. And as we will read in today's passage, we now have this place in which Matthias replaces Judas as one of the disciples. So this replacement is an important piece to who we are as a church, but there's also a development piece. What are we doing to bring up new leaders? How do we do that? How do we encourage new leaders in the church as well?

So I invite you to read along **Acts 1:12-26**

12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. **13** When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. **14** They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) **16** and said, "Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. **17** He was one of our number and shared in our ministry."

18 (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. **19** Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the Book of Psalms: "'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, 'May another take his place of leadership.' **21** Therefore it is

necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, **22** beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

23 So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.

24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen **25** to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." **26**

Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You, Lord. how Your Word is living and active and it's so much more than just history but that is applicable to our lives each day. Lord, we pray that You will open our ears and open our hearts to be molded by You. That we may hear Your Word and that we may live each day growing closer to you in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

In this passage, we now have the people of the apostles who have left the Mount of Olives where the ascension of Jesus took place and it says it was about a Sabbath's day's journey. It's a little over a kilometer. So it's the amount which people said you could walk and it wouldn't be considered work on the Sabbath. It was usually the distance from your home to the closest synagogue. So here they are. They are gathering back in the upper room.

Now some have said that this may be the same upper room where the Last Supper took place. It's not necessarily the case. We do know that in the temple, there were a number of upper rooms in which the early Christians met regularly. So they are in this place. As it's noted, there's about 120 of them. That would include the 11 apostles. That would include the seventy, which we read about in **Luke chapter 10**. It would also include the women and Mary and Jesus brothers, who, although His brothers weren't always for Him while He was alive. After they experienced the resurrection, they also became completely devoted to Him and followers of Christ.

It is also interesting that it is translated here, "... with the women." That word "women" is the same word which is also the word for "wives." So it is very likely that the wives of the apostles were also with them. For example, we know that Peter was married, because we have the incident where Jesus goes to Peter's mother-in-law to heal her and spend some time with her. So the apostles were married. We've got women there. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 9:5, it says, "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?" - which would be Peter. So one of the things which came up in the early church was, "Are leaders allowed to be married or not?" One of the reasons why, in many of the nominations it's okay is because of this - it seems that the early apostles were also married.

So they've come to this room. But I want you to notice what they are doing. It says in **Acts 1:14**, "**14** They all joined together constantly in prayer... "

Jesus had told them to wait for the Holy Spirit. They were told to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit of God to descend upon them. And what did they do during that time? They spent the time in prayer. And the prayer wasn't, "Oh, Lord, I hope He keeps His promises. I hope, Jesus, that you will send the Spirit." No, the prayer was, "Lord prepare us for what you are calling us to do. Lord, strengthen us, give us boldness to speak out as you have called us to speak out." This constant prayer is a prayer of depth in the sense of, "Lord, we are yours and we have complete trust in You. Please give us what we need with the expectation that it will happen." So here they are in constant prayer.

Notice it says constant prayer. Persistent prayer. It's not, "Okay, we prayed once about it, or twice or three times. Nothing happens so therefore; well, I guess God, either you didn't hear me or the answer is no so I'm going to quit praying." We know from years of experience for many of us that prayer has to go over and over and over. It is constant prayer. It is praying continuously for the Lord to work either in our lives or maybe in someone else's life that we know. And we continue to pray. Even when we don't see results, there is this aspect of constant and persistent prayer. It is this place of knowing that prayer is essential to what they do.

There is also a second piece to it. It says, "They joined together in constant prayer." Oftentimes, I know growing up, we knew that in church services, we prayed as a community. But prayer was often seen as an individual thing. "This is my connection with God. I pray to God." That is important, but prayer is so important as a community and as a church. Prayer is essential as a community.

It is interesting when you look back at the Lord's Prayer, which you can read in Luke 11 and Matthew 6, the disciples begin with the question, "Lord, teach us to pray." They do not say, "Lord, teach us **how** to pray," but they say, "Teach us to pray." Also, notice the communal aspect. Teach **us** to pray.

Then Jesus gives the Lord's Prayer. When you go through the Lord's Prayer, you realize that all the pronouns are plural. It is, "**Our** Father who art in heaven." It is, "Give **us** this day our daily bread. Forgive **us** our debts, as **we** forgive our debtors. Lead **us** not into temptation." The Lord's Prayer is a communal prayer. What we see from this early church is they value the community in prayer. And we, as a church, need to value communal prayer.

There is a group that comes on the first and third Tuesday of the month to pray. Now, I will admit that I'm not there very often, but I should be because God calls us as a community to pray. In September, we will have a week of prayer as a community. God invites us to that place to gather together as a community and pray. Communal prayer is so very important to who we are. In **Romans 15:5-6** we see, "**5** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, **6** so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." That praise of one voice comes through prayer as it does through singing. Singing is, in many ways, prayer to God. And that is done in the community.

So here we see in this early church, even before the Holy Spirit came, they understood the importance of prayer and praying as a community. Then Peter stands up. Now it's interesting that Peter is the one who stands up. If we think back to the night before the crucifixion, there were two people who denied or betrayed Christ. Judas Iscariot and Peter. One might almost think that the rest of the disciples are like, "Well, Peter, you're one of us and we'll accept you and all but Peter, you're gonna take a back seat for a while because you denied the Lord. We can't have you out front and then when things get rough, you go, 'Oh, yeah, I'm out of here again.'"

But in **John 21**, we saw that Jesus also restored Peter. And Jesus told Peter to, "... feed my sheep." And in many ways, placed him into that place where Jesus said, "I have forgiven you. I know that your past has been checkered but I have called you to this role, not because of who you are but because of who I am and how I work through you."

So Jesus restored Peter to this place. And now Peter stands up and says, "Brothers and sisters, we have to fulfill the scriptures." That gives us two insights about Peter. One is he knew the scriptures well enough that he knew what needed to be fulfilled. And two is that he gave all authority to Scripture. He understood that scripture was the Word of God and had to take place. When God says, "This is the way I want you to live," then that's the way. Or if God says, "This is going to happen," then this is going to happen. Because God's authority comes through Scripture.

So Peter says, "We have to replace Judas." Now, it's interesting here - and you'll see this in verse 18 and 19 - there's parentheses right around verse 18 or 19. It's almost like, if you ever watch either a TV show or a movie and there's this conversation happening, and all of a sudden you get this backflash to hear something that happened beforehand to give you a better understanding of what took place here. Right? That's kind of what Luke is doing. Luke is writing to Christians and he's kind of like, "Okay, so Peter says, 'We've got to replace Judas. Hold on, let me explain to you back here a minute what happened to Judas and why we need to replace him.'"

So there's this little interlude there where he says, "Here's Judas." **Acts 1:18-19**, "**18** (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. **19** Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)" It's that same idea.

Now, some of you may know that Luke's storytelling here of what happens to Judas is different than what we read in Matthew. In Matthew, we read that Judas took the 30 pieces of silver which he got for betraying Jesus, which is the price of a slave, came back to the temple leaders and he said, "You know, I can't have this... and he threw it down into the temple." And then it says, "The Jewish leader said, 'Well, we can't have this because this is blood money.' So therefore; they went and bought the potter's field to bury those people." And it says, "Judas went out and he hung himself."

And critics of Scripture say, "Well, look, here is an obvious contradiction. Therefore scripture cannot be true." And if we look at witnesses of an event and you ask two people what happened, they could give you two different stories, even though they saw the same thing. Because there are different pieces that struck them. It said that Judas bought a field. When Judas threw the money back into the temple, whose money was it? Who did it belong to? It belonged to Judas. It was the money of Judas that bought the field, whether he did it or whether the temple leaders did it, it doesn't matter. That field was owned by Judas.

And in Matthew, it says that he hung himself. Now there are lots of theories as to how that all played out in connection to the one here. Did the limb break? In Jewish tradition, when a person would consider themselves hanging themselves, there were different options. One was to actually hang himself with the rope. The other was a phrase which used for suicide, which was to throw themselves onto a sword, which could have been a possibility as well. But let's not get stuck on that.

Let's go back to here's what's happening with the early church. The early church gathers together and they say, "We need to replace Judas." Jesus appointed 12. Twelve is significant. In the Old Testament, there are 12 tribes of Israel and Jesus says that He appoints 12. The apostles understood that this number 12 was significant for the 12 tribes of Israel, to unify them into the Church of Christ. So they realize along with the passages that David wrote about the fulfillment of this, that Judas would have to be replaced.

In fact, if you ever go through the Psalms, there are over 70 Messianic prophecies within the Psalms that you can look up and that are fulfilled either by Jesus or during the life of Jesus. So that in this sense, again, we see how God through Scripture gives his authority into leading history.

So they say to themselves, "We need to replace Judas." When they go to replace Judas, they say, "Okay, there has to be some qualifications." And the qualifications come from **Acts 1:21-22**, "21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

So there is the qualification of being taught by Christ. That they spent this time with Christ. But notice how they specify not just the time from the baptism to the ascension, but the most important time is that they had to be with us with His resurrection. They had to experience the resurrection.

Because Jesus is not just a story which happened or a historical person which, "Okay, we know all the facts." Jesus invites us into a personal relationship in which we experience His resurrection and the life giving power that comes because of His resurrection. And they say in order for him to be an apostle, he needs to be one who has experienced the resurrection.

So how do we determine that? So they came up and they ended up with two people who they said, "These two people fit the criteria well. Now Lord, help us decide." So what did they do? They pray. They go back to prayer. It's not a matter of, "Okay, well, let's just put together a couple of lists and we'll figure this out." No, it's a matter of they pray. They spend time in prayer saying, "Lord, you need to guide us in this area."

We need to be in communion with God for prayer.

Then, as was typical for that time period, they drew lots. In the Old Testament actually, it's a common factor or common knowledge that they draw lots. In **Proverbs 16:33**, it says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

So they drew lots and the lot fell on Matthias, chosen by God. In many ways, this is the third qualification for an apostle. One whom God chooses. Jesus appointed the other 11 disciples and through the drawing of lots, God appointed Matthias as the 12th. We also see a shift here. A shift from the term "disciple" to "apostle." The term "apostle" is one that means "sent out." One who is sent out to give a message. A disciple is one who learns. One who is being taught. One who is devoted to the teachings of another person.

And notice in **Matthew chapter 28:19**, where it says, "Jesus told them to go into all the world... (so now he is sending them out - so now they have become apostles) ... and make disciples." Make people become learners and devoted to me. So here the apostles are doing this. This practice continued within the church, of choosing people to go out and to do the work of the Lord. Here we have it again, where they pray. It is earnestly seeking God's face to say, "Lord, we trust that You will supply those who need to be in these positions."

Today, we have that again. Today, we saw with the fulfillment and the installation of elders and deacons, how God continues to provide for His church and for leadership.

But there is more than just the leaders in this piece. There is an aspect that each of us need to continue in a time of prayer. Each of us needs to spend time with God. Because, as I said before, the resurrected Jesus is not a history story that takes place. But with the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus invites us into a personal relationship with Him. He says, "I desire to be with you. Always." To grow that relationship allows you to grow as a disciple but it is also, if you remember what we said at the beginning, what is our prayer? Our prayer is not that God will do something for us, but that God will do something in us and with us. That God will prepare us for ministry that He is already prepared in advance for us to do.

So today, we are invited to that place of prayer. His office bearers, as was stated here already, Jim [Vandenberg] talked about the importance of prayer, and how as a community, we live off the prayer of others. That we pray not just for those who are ill, but that we pray for those who are in leadership. That we gather together to pray and encourage and to support them. But then, as Tim said, that we also come humbly before God with a complete understanding that it is God who works within us. It is not my work, but it is God working through me. That I lay all that I am at His feet. He carries me to do His work.

Just as God carried the apostles through all that they did - and we'll see more as we go through the book of Acts - God carries each of us through every day of our life. So today, we join as a community and we pray. As a church, may we always value, with the highest sense, the importance of communal prayer. May our leadership always remember that being called by God, they too need to lead us in prayer. Amen.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for the reminder this morning of the authority of scripture but this deep need for communal prayer. Lord, we thank You for the way that you provide leadership within the church and Lord, for the way that You call leadership into those positions. Lord, it was acknowledged again this morning of how You've called them and that it is out of that calling that we humbly respond with, "Yes, Lord, here I am. Take me." Lord, we ask that You will carry our office bearers, our leaders of ministry teams, our volunteers. All of those who serve in ministry in many different ways. Each of us, as a congregation, as we are a witness to those around us. Lord, we pray that You will fill us with Your Spirit, that You will prepare us for the work that You have in store for us, and that You will strengthen us each day to do Your work. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*