

IS THE SPIRIT CHOOSING YOU?

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

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We are nearing the end of our journey through the Acts of the Apostles now. (We'll have next Sunday still—the Day of Pentecost—after which we'll return to a Hebrew Scripture reading as our first lesson each Sunday.) So, it is time for us to sit with all we have learned from this amazing text about what an Easter faith is all about. At the very heart of Acts—present as the driving force in each story of the early days of the Jesus movement—is the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is no abstraction in this book: it is God's gift to the believing Church, sent to allow it to continue the acts of power by which Jesus had come to be seen as the Son of God.

Today we are back at the beginning of the book of Acts, right after the account of the Ascension, and the disciples (or, now, the *apostles*) are taking care of the very first order of business on their agenda: replacing Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus and subsequently died. This story is very important for us while we are still in the Great Fifty Days of Easter, because it is a story in which a person who had been a follower is called to be a leader. The choice of Matthias restores the number of twelve apostles; we hear nothing else about him anywhere in Acts. Indeed, he may have been unknown to Luke's audience. The message is clear: anyone in that audience—and any one of us—may be called by the Spirit to a new level of service in the life of the Jesus movement.

Let's just reflect a little more on what we learn about Matthias from today's lesson, remembering again that it is the only place in the New Testament in which he is mentioned at all. Peter is addressing “the believers” – a group of about one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15) – so picture something like a small congregation that had formed in the very early days after the first Easter. Peter lays out the qualifications for Judas' replacement, saying this:

“... one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning 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.” (Acts 1:21-22)

So, the person chosen must be someone who was present throughout Jesus' ministry. This is very interesting because it tells us that there was a circle around Jesus that was larger than just the disciples, following, observing, but not leading. The congregation of one hundred and twenty proposes two qualified candidates from among that circle. Then they prayed to know the Lord's will, and, as was very standard in the ancient world, cast lots to learn the answer. The lot falls on Matthias, he is added to the apostles, and we hear no more about him.

Think about the whole sequence of events. It begins with a need: there must be twelve apostles. Next, what is required to fill the need is established. Next, the community responds with candidates. Next, they pray in faith. And finally, they trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit through a common, trusted process (casting lots). A choice is made, and the need is filled.

And so Matthias, a man who has been a follower, an observer, a believer, but not a leader, is asked to step forward into an extraordinarily important role. And again, the way Luke tells the story, it is the process that is important, not the details of who Matthias was. Indeed, it is as if Luke deliberately leaves those details out. It is as if he wants to say to his audience, “this could be you – any day, any time.”

We are almost to the end of these wonderful Sundays in which we encounter the power of the Holy Spirit each week. We have been reminded that the early Jesus movement had all things in common; we have learned of miraculous healings; we have seen God reach out to the Ethiopian Eunuch and reflected on what this might mean for us today; we have watched in wonder as Philip is divinely transported in the flash of an eye. And now today, we encounter something very personal, very immediate, very compelling, in which the Spirit says: today, I choose *you*.

Two weeks ago, I suggested that the twenty and thirty somethings in our lives and in our community are good candidates for who the Ethiopian Eunuch might represent in our world today. Today, in asking who Matthias might represent, we are challenged to look not outside ourselves but within. I'm sure that Matthias did not leave his house the day of that congregational meeting expecting to return home as one of the twelve apostles! Yet he did; in a few short minutes, the Holy Spirit changed his life. *God chose him.*

Ask yourself today, with seriousness and openness to hearing God's answer: are you standing just outside a ministry that the Holy Spirit would like to choose you to do? Is there something you have been watching, caring about, worried about, curious about, that might just need you to become involved in, or even to lead it? The book of Acts has been teaching us about the power of an Easter faith, a Spirit-led faith. Today, we are reminded that it all begins with individuals paying attention and saying yes when God chooses them.

Sometimes it comes to us in a sense that God just won't leave us alone about something – we might think of it as a sense of “holy bothering.” If God is bothering you, don't ignore it! Ask what the need is, ask if you can fill it, pray about it, and if God's answer is yes, cast your lot with the new thing the Spirit is choosing you to do.

You won't be sorry, and the needs of the world are so urgent. If you've been chosen, say yes.