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Reestablishing the Twelve Apostles

ACTS 1:12-26 ¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

¹⁵In 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." ¹⁸(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰"For it is written in the book of Psalms,

'Let his homestead become desolate,

and let there be no one to live in it;

and

'Let another take his position of overseer.'

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.

The apostles travel the short distance over the steep descent from Mount Olivet and the equally steep ascent back into the city of Jerusalem. They return to the upper room where they had shared in the last supper of Jesus. Those gathered there had experienced the entire ministry of Jesus, including his crucifixion and resurrection appearances. The eleven apostles are joined with Mary the mother of Jesus, some of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, and some of Jesus' extended family (verse 14). This is the nucleus of the church that will be empowered for mission by the Father's gift of the Spirit. This time between the ascension and Pentecost is a significant pause between God's mighty acts, a pause in which the church's task is to wait and pray, "Come, Holy Spirit." The witness of disciples must be more than just earnest striving and busy activity. They must await God's grace with expectant hearts. Waiting and praying teach us that God's gift of the Spirit is never our assured possession. God's Spirit must be constantly sought anew in prayer.

The scene mirrors the beginning of Luke's first volume. The gospel begins with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, the mother of Jesus, in order to give birth to Israel's Savior. Acts begins with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the apostles, in order to give birth to the church. As with Jesus, who was filled with the Holy Spirit throughout his saving mission on earth, the church will be filled with the Holy Spirit for its expanding mission in the world. Throughout Luke's inspired writing, Mary is a model for the

kind of expectant faith in God's promises which Jesus desires for his church: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Luke 1:45).

As the apostles wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit, they discern through prayer and Scripture that they should choose another to complete the number of the twelve apostles. The betrayal of Judas and his ultimate suicide left a gap that must be filled before the Spirit descends to empower the apostolic church. Someone must take his office of responsibility within the core circle of apostles. The choice of an apostle is made this time, not by Jesus, but by those who will continue his work. The Twelve must be reconstituted before Pentecost, so that in that event Israel will be restored as the people of God.

Peter addresses the community about the process for replacing Judas. He states that the candidate must be "one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us" (verse 21). This span of witness includes the entire time of Jesus' ministry and teaching, from the baptizing of John to the ascension of Jesus. The unique qualifications of this office demonstrate its foundational role for the church. Two men are put forward for the apostolic ministry: Barsabbas and Matthias. Accompanied by the prayer of the community, the final choice is left to God. Through the casting of lots, the Lord's choice of Matthias is made clear. The decision is made both on qualifications and on divine choice. It is made from below, from the ranks of those whom the prayerful community chooses, and from above, as God graciously guides his church to fulfill its mission.

Matthias is then counted with the eleven apostles and the number is restored to twelve. The twelve apostles link the church to the events which originated the church, and through their "witness to the resurrection" they lead the church to fulfill its mission. With Peter, they testify to what has happened so that it may continue to happen within the church. With the twelve apostles restored, the community is ready for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection and discussion

- In what ways is Mary a model for the newly emerging church?

- Why is waiting and praying just as important for the church as projects and activities?

- Peter describes the passage which he quotes from the book of Psalms as a revelation from God, that is, as Scripture “which the Holy Spirit through David foretold.” In what ways does this description of Scripture imply both its divine and human origins?

- The process for replacing Judas among the twelve apostles forms a precedent for how to make decisions as a community, looking to God to show the way. What elements of this process of discernment can help the church make decisions today?

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, teach me how to wait and pray for the experience of your outpouring. Transform me with your grace and make me holy so that I may bear witness to the name of Jesus through what I say and do. Help me to await Christ's return with joyful hope.