

Date: May 28, 2006 (Easter 7)  
Text: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 (John 17:6-9)  
Location: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford, SK.  
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Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

If you were daydreaming this morning or if you had stepped out to use the washroom during this morning's epistle reading from The Acts of the Apostles, you would have missed an amazing story.

The story that we heard recounted today is about how the earliest disciples- the closest followers of Christ- chose or called Matthias to join them as the twelfth apostle. You see the apostles had a problem. They knew that there were supposed to be 12 of them. After all, that (12) is a holy number. It is by 12 that Christ formed his earliest group.

And herein lies their problem there was now only 11 apostles. Why? It would appear that Judas chose to kill himself rather than live with the knowledge that he had handed over the Son of God to torture and death.

And it is here, at the beginning of Acts, that Judas' replacement is chosen. St. Peter stands up (at what appears to be the first church council meeting ever!) and declares that they need a replacement for Judas to fulfill Scripture (Acts 1:16).

The criteria for this replacement are that it has to be a man who traveled with them throughout Christ's entire ministry. Peter says, "For one of these must become a witness with us of [Christ's] resurrection." (Acts 1:22)

The second criteria for acceptance is that the person must be approved by God for this important ministry (Acts 1:24). Interestingly, they sought God's favour by praying in earnest and casting lots (Acts 1:26). Whoever the lot fell upon- that would be a sign of God's approval.

Since we here at Zion Lutheran Church are a congregation that seeks God's blessing, purpose, and direction- I thought that we would model what those early disciples did in choosing Matthias to be Judas' replacement.

Thus, I have secretly seen to it that we have cast lots to see who our leader will be today. I now ask everyone to look on the inside cover of their bulletin. If you see an "X" in the top right corner, please raise your hand.

(One member raises her/his hand)

Good! This means that you have been chosen to be our preacher and leader this morning. What do you think? Scary, isn't it? After all, all of a sudden you are being thrust into something you have not prepared for. What will happen? What will I do? What does this mean?

I think we can all imagine how Matthias felt when the "lot fell upon him". Now Matthias was "one of the twelve...".

In reading today's account from Acts, this appears to have happened very quickly. One minute Peter rises to speak, and the next (after a time of prayer) Matthias is endorsed, approved, called and ordained. If only seminary would go so quickly.

With a "fast-track candidacy" process like that one, you'd think his name would appear on a list of "famous call stories of the Bible." But I'll bet that his is not the first name that comes to mind when somebody asks you to choose a biblical character whose call story most inspires you.

In biblical terms, the call that Matthias receives is also less than stellar. There is no burning bush like Moses, there is no whale like Jonah, there is no horse like St. Paul- in fact here in this mundane looking call all we see is what looks to be a church council meeting. Peter, the chairman of the congregation stands up and says that they need another pastor, the council agrees, they pray, and a candidate is selected. Compared to the other luminaries of the Bible, this isn't the kind of stuff that makes for a great Hollywood movie.

Rather than using whales, fire, or angels God called Matthias through the ordinary workings of a bunch of humans, gathered together in order to fill an empty position. No big dramatics; just a crowd of earth-bound people. Doing the work of heaven.

It is perhaps surprising that the important task of filling out the Twelve – of making complete the fullness of God's plan – involves such an ordinary process. A process so ordinary that it is completed by the casting of lots – not unlike the flip of a coin, or the rolling of dice. A process so ordinary that even the qualifications are, well, ordinary. Or perhaps we should say, "the qualification," for there's really only one of them. And that is to have spent time traveling with Jesus and apostles

Not just a few high points of an exorcism here and a miraculous healing there. Not just the way that Jesus captured people's attention with brilliant parables and lessons about lilies. The one who is called is one who has taken time to learn the whole picture: the plan of God, foretold in the Scripture, played out in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The one who is called knows time that spans heaven and earth.

So the call process for Matthias is an ordinary one, carried out by ordinary humans and requiring ordinary preparation. What kind of a call story is this? If the drama is not to be found in the process of call, or in preparation for the call, then surely there will be a little drama in the call itself, in what the call is TO. Surely Matthias will bring about great things for the sake of the people of God. Something along the lines of guiding people out of bondage, or leading a mission to the Gentiles. Wouldn't ya think?

But no; once again ordinary is the operative principle. As I mentioned earlier, the book of Acts tells nothing more about Matthias, nothing about incredible deeds as Apostle Number Twelve. Matthias is called for nothing more dramatic than this: to give testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. Unlike those other great calls of the Bible, this call doesn't beckon ahead to the great things that somebody will do, but rather it looks back to the great things God has already done: from the baptism of John until the ascension into heaven. An ordinary call, bearing witness to an extraordinary God.

And when we think of the great call stories of the Bible, may we remember that this story – Matthias' story- is OUR story – this ordinary story is a great call story, too.

AMEN