

A Reflection by Fr. Jon

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, "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-- for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. So 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." So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

This isn't one of those passages that too many (any at all??) would likely peg as their favorite. The choosing of Matthias to take up the ministry of Judas doesn't seem, at first blush anyway, to be much of a story at all.

However, this story is, I think, one that contemporary Christians would be wise to think about because it tells us something about how God thinks about what we do as the church. I think it also has a reassuring message for us when our human sinfulness occasionally overwhelms the mission of the church.

There aren't too many people whose actions were more counter to the mission of God than Judas. He literally sold Jesus into death. And yet, God transformed that tragedy into something amazing – the resurrection and our subsequent salvation. In fact, God so anticipated the depravity of human sinfulness, that it was actually part of the plan to free us from bondage to sin. In these days, we are experiencing the fallout from the failure of leadership across the church, from the crisis of predatory priests in the catholic church, to the divisions over LGBT+ persons, to the abandonment of the teachings of Jesus by so-called Christians in love with political power.

All of these have contributed to a cultural shift against Christianity, which was accelerated by the experience of COVID. And yet, somehow, God is working to use these tragedies to refine, reshape, and rework us so that our churches might be better able to continue Jesus' ministry.

And the other crucial point is that, even now, there are people amongst us who are gifted to do the work, who are just waiting to be called into service and mission. Each of us has an ability, a talent, a resource, that when joined together with others provides what is needed to continue the ministry of Jesus. When Matthias first joined in the community of those following Jesus, I'm sure he didn't imagine becoming an apostle like Peter or John. But the church recognized, with the help of the Spirit, that it needed to be a living movement focused on the future if it was to be an effective agent of God's love.

WE are all called to be part of God's ongoing mission of renewal and salvation, we are all called to be laborers in the vineyard, workers building the kingdom of God. And this little story reminds us that heroes of faith are raised in every generation and that there is no reason that any of us might not be the treasured saints of tomorrow.