

# Moving On

(Acts 1:15-26)

(Series: Reimagining Church; Message 5)

*<sup>15</sup>In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”*

*<sup>18</sup>(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. <sup>19</sup>Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)*

*<sup>20</sup>“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.”*

*<sup>21</sup>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, <sup>22</sup>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.”*

*<sup>23</sup>So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” <sup>26</sup>Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:15-26)*

## Message

**It’s only mid-September and people are already eager to put 2020 behind them; few would consider 2020 a good year.**

There is the world-wide pandemic with almost a million lives lost; police brutality and racial injustices dominate the headlines; tornadoes, hurricanes, and fires have devastated people’s lives, and this is a brutal presidential election year...

On a more personal level, many have dealt with illness, surgery/recovery; financial hardship and unemployment; loss of a family member or close friend.

This year has been a reminder that life is constantly **changing**; and while we think we have control of some things, that is little more than a myth.

**That brings us to Acts 1:15-26, to our series on Re-imagining Church.** We’re searching for God’s preferred future for Covenant Church by looking back at the Spirit-led Church in Acts.

The disciples were experiencing **major** changes: their Rabbi, their Messiah, has left; the

Holy Spirit has been promised; they are hiding out in an upper room - waiting and praying. Until now they knew who they were - disciples; until now they knew what they were supposed to do - just do exactly what their Rabbi did. Until now, they had lived their life in Galilee; now they are alone in Jerusalem. Their future is unknown.

With Jesus' ascending, all their dreams of a political, earthly kingdom are gone. Little do they know, their long-held assumptions, their traditional religious practices, and their self-comforting paradigms, are behind them. They will be moving on. They have little choice.

## ACKNOWLEDGE THE PAST

**Because of the suicide death of Judas, they're down to eleven disciples.** Another significant change; another major transition. Think about it for a moment: They had been with Judas all day, every day for about three years. They knew him well; he was part of their community. And now their community was incomplete. Judas' death had left an opening; Judas must be replaced.

**Impetuous Peter can't wait. He steps up and becomes the storyteller.** His telling will name **Judas** as **THE** betrayer of Jesus - the burden of collective guilt placed on one and only one betrayer, on one and only one ministry failure...

Peter takes the initiative: Acts **1:18** - "*With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field...*" It is not a just reference to the betrayal event; but to Judas' general lifestyle. We know the thirty pieces of silver he was given for the betrayal was returned - tossed at the feet of the high priest (**Matthew 27:3,5**). Judas' didn't buy this field with those monies...

Judas had a reputation for **siphoning money** (i.e. stealing) from the purse he carried on behalf of Jesus and the disciples. (**John 12:6**). It's increasingly clear Judas believed the common wisdom that Messiah would overthrow the Roman government and set up an earthly kingdom. So Judas **purchased** a plot of land on which to build a **home** and was likely paying for it with embezzled monies - i.e., his "wicked" lifestyle, his "looking out for himself" lifestyle.

The text leaves us with an ambiguity: Is Peter telling the story as God would tell the story, or is he embellishing it as we might in talking about the dead and their mistakes... On the surface it seems clear. Peter notes: Judas died a horrible death. He did a horrible thing - he betrayed Jesus. He is the betrayer. Nothing good will come of his legacy. The logic appears crystal clear.

**But that is the logic of "the before." Before Pentecost, before the Holy Spirit comes.**

True - the Holy Spirit was already speaking through David in the Psalms: a betrayer was foretold; Judas was that betrayer. Judas' wickedness kept him from seeing Jesus and His mission clearly. Judas appears to "betray" Jesus to force Jesus to show his hand, to initiate the Roman overthrow. Judas was in a hurry to call the question - in his time.

When it didn't happen, he realized his whole life was messed up (i.e., "wasted"). His life ends on the very ground he'd hoped would be his life's culmination.

But the last word on Judas does not come from Peter; the last word will come from Jesus. As we have been saying, God's will is (often) different from our (in this case, Peter's) opinion.

Peter brings up Judas's story for a reason: Peter wants to see Judas **replaced**... Peter assumes the role of storyteller.

Storytellers have an awesome power (and responsibility). They take people's lives and play with them - like juggling balls in the air. People (esp. the dead) have no control over how their lives are used or remembered...

Peter tells the 120 this was all part of God's plan. Jesus had to be betrayed, arrested, judged, condemned, and crucified - and the betrayer was Judas. (That is, God is still in control in spite of the apparently messed up circumstances).

It is interesting that Peter brings this up (after having betrayed Jesus three times) but we are left to deal with Judas' betrayal story in the light of the resurrected Jesus. The problem here is not Peter.

The problem is the disciples are still coming to grips with the power of Christ's **resurrection** and what it means to people who live and die in **shame**, in pain, in **guilt**. It is a problem for contemporary disciples as well.

The last words are no longer **ours**. The last word on our life - on everyone's life - belongs to **Jesus**. His resurrected power even reaches into the grave - even into Judas' grave. His resurrected power can transform your life, remove your shame, heal your pain, and erase your guilt. It can transform our neighbors lives...and transform this world.

**In the light of their concern (an earlier question to Jesus) about the restoration of Israel's reign in this world, Peter is focused on filling out their number.**

*"Now it is necessary to chose his successor."* Was it necessary to have **twelve? Yes!** **Matthew 19:27** provides the background. Peter asks, *"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"* ("Tell us what is in this for us"). Jesus replies, *"I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

The "twelve" understood they represented the twelve **tribes of Israel**; each one of them would rule alongside Messiah...there had to be twelve (a.s.a.p. for Peter).

Luke isn't suggesting Peter does this with a political motivation; Peter seeks to do this out of his faithfulness to Jesus' teaching, and the apostleship bestowed on them... But Peter suggests it from a paradigm that will soon be radically transformed...

## **ACCEPT THE PRESENT**

**In their search for a twelfth disciple, Peter outlines the qualifications:**

--He must have **accompanied Jesus** from the beginning and throughout his ministry - from his baptism through his ascension.

--He must be an **eyewitness** to the Lord's appearances after the **resurrection**. He must

be able to personally authenticate Christ's resurrection.

Finding someone like this is no small task. They are looking for someone worthy to give witness to Jesus.

**Amazingly, they find two qualified among the 120: Joseph and Matthias.** They decide between the two the only way they know - **Old Testament** style (cf. **1:24f**) - leaving us with a second ambiguity: is this a divine election or the last signature of the old way (Casting Lots). Let's say both.

Peter prays: (**1:25**) *"Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."* (Ouch!)

Then they drew lots (lit. cast lots; they threw dice). They're facing one of the biggest decisions in the early church, and they roll dice (cast/draw lots). Amazing! Matthias is selected. (Gene Apple calls it a Las Vegas style prayer meeting; yet, it has become common practice in many churches)

Why would they choose Matthias that way? Today it is hard for us to imagine making a decision of this magnitude without deferring to the **guidance** of the **Holy Spirit** (How many of us would recommend choosing our next pastor this way?) but the Holy Spirit had not yet come.

It's not coincidental that after the Holy Spirit comes on all believers at Pentecost, the New Testament Church **never** draws/casts lots again to determine God's leading or God's leaders.

**In Acts 1, we find a pretty **unimpressive** group with an unimpressive track record. This too, is a picture of the "before."**

The "calling" on Mathias made; he joins the other disciples in their calling: to pray and wait; to wait and pray. Matthias, along with the others, will wait for the Spirit to come; for the Spirit to speak; and join with the others for the sake of Jesus.

They are incredibly **flawed** individuals. They battled insecurity, fear, brokenness. They failed to understand Jesus' teaching; fought over who was the most important, and bailed when the going got difficult

If Matthias is the right one, if God has called him, then God will do to him what God does to all who hear the words of Jesus--he will sit them down, fill them with hope, and ask them to join the others in prayer.

Luke is setting the stage so the reader understands the **power** the Holy Spirit brings with his coming and his staying in the next chapter - Acts 2.

## ANTICIPATE THE FUTURE

**For the moment, they're in Jerusalem **obediently preparing** for the Spirit - by **waiting** and **praying** (1:14); **together** in **unity**. They're ready to move on in Acts 2.**

Actually, that's still the work of **disciples** and followers of Jesus - to wait for the

promise(s) of Jesus to be fulfilled...

--Promises of his **Church**: [Jesus] *"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."* (**Matthew 16:18**)

--Promises of his **Return**: [Angels] *"This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* (**Acts 1:11b**)

--Promises of **Triumph**: [Paul] *"when every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"* (**Philippians 2:10-11**)

Its helpful to periodically pause and ask how we're doing praying and waiting for these promises of Jesus to be fulfilled?

**The best way to "anticipate an uncertain future" is to follow this pattern of the disciples: obeying, preparing, waiting and praying together (1:14).**

We've been praying, *"God fill me with you Spirit."* This week add, *"Holy Spirit, what do You want me to do?"* Allow **people** to prompt this prayer in you. When you meet people, when they call or text you, when someone cuts you off driving allow that to prompt you, *"Holy Spirit, what do You want me to do?"*

Allow your **feelings** to prompt you. When you experience fear, gratitude, anger, or joy; when you're tempted or bored, ask, *"Holy Spirit, what do You want me to do?"*

Allow the day's **events** to prompt you. When you step into the meeting, open a book to read, sit down for a meal, pray, *"Holy Spirit, what do You want me to do."*

What can we anticipate the Holy Spirit will do in our lives/church? Here is a short list: The Holy Spirit will reveal who God is, convict us of sin and unrighteousness, points us and others to Christ, enlighten our mind, provide guidance, sanctify and make us holy. He will assure us it is well between God and us. The Holy Spirit will equip leaders in Christ's Church, guide our discernment, gift members of his church, promote unity, evangelize the Gospel, make disciples of Jesus' followers, and helps bring in the Harvest. The Spirit will move us into God's preferred future.

Fact is, **everything** God-honoring that happens in the life of a Christ-follower and in the life of Christ's Church is done in the strength of Christ's Spirit.

**While the eleven focused on finding #12; God was preparing to interrupt them.** The New Israel, Christ's **Church**, is about to be birthed by the Spirit, **transforming** all their preconceived paradigms/traditions, and opening up their lives to the world.

Whatever ideas of leadership Peter and the other apostles imagined, they could not anticipate or account for what God was about to do... From that moment forward, everything they considered commonplace - even a simple selection process (every administrative act and bureaucratic gesture) would become subject to waiting on the Holy Spirit and the work of prayer.

**The Holy Spirit will empower us and move us into our God-given mission.**

Jerry Hawthorne (Wheaton College) writes - *"Jesus is living proof of how those who are*

*His followers may exceed the limitations of their humanness, in order that they, like Him, might carry to completion against all odds their God-given mission in life, by the Holy Spirit."*

Then how is it, that having been filled with the Spirit, we have so little **"power?"**

Tony Campolo tells of a man who walked the aisle at every revival meetings in town to recommit his life to Christ falling down on his knees at the alter and yell, "Fill me, Jesus! Fill me, Jesus!" only to lose his excitement in the next few days and return to his worldly ways. People became cynical about his commitments, and one time when he was yelling, "Fill me, Jesus! Fill me, Jesus!" a woman in the back of the church shouted, "Don't do it, Lord! Don't do it Lord! He leaks!" We all leak. Only continuous prayer can stop the hemorrhaging.

Today, few church members **arrange** their **lives** (as Jesus did) around practices (waiting, praying, engaging the Word, discernment, etc.) that allow them to draw power from the **Spirit** - and yet they continue to wonder why nothing is happening..

Frank Kock tells the story of two battleships that were assigned to training maneuvers in U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings (The Naval Institute's magazine).

They had encountered bad weather for several days. Visibility remained poor with patchy fog so the captain remained on the bridge keeping an eye out.

Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing of one ship reported, "Light, bearing on starboard bow." "Is it steady or moving astern?" the captain called out.

The lookout replied, "Steady, Captain" which meant we were on a dangerous collision course with that that ship.

The captain then called to the signalman, "Signal that ship: 'We are on a collision course, advise you change course twenty degrees.'"

Back came the signal: "Advise you to change course twenty degrees."

The captain said, "Send, 'I'm a captain, change course twenty degrees'"

"I'm a seaman second class," came the reply, "Advise you change course twenty degrees"

By this time the Captain was furious. He said, "Send, 'I am a United States Battleship. Change course twenty degrees immediately!'"

Back came the flashing light, "I am a lighthouse." We changed course.

**We often pray for the Spirit to come and **move** among us; the reality is, for us the Spirit is **already here** and we're the ones who need to **change** course and **move on**.**