

## New Leaders

June 24, 2018

Acts 1:12-26

When I last preached two weeks ago, we began a study of the book of Acts. This study will take some time, so be prepared. Then, we noticed that the book of Acts begins with the same event told at the end of the book of Luke, which is the first volume of Luke's two volume work: the ascension. Jesus told His disciples that they would indeed be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in the surrounding area of Judea, in the region of the outcasts among them (Samaria), and even to the uttermost parts of the earth. This news of the message of Jesus was going to spread...everywhere.

But first, there had to be an empowering, a receiving of the power of the Holy Spirit. It would be a life changing, history changing event in the coming days. They were to stay put, stay in Jerusalem until it happened. They were not to go out with the message without the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Until then, they were to wait.

Let's see what they did while they were waiting. READ Acts 1:12-26.

Main point: The Church was designed to have a multiplicity of leaders.

To some, this might be a narrow understanding of this text. And there are, for sure, several issues addressed here. There is the waiting for the Spirit, the tragic ending of Judas' life, and new "Christian" understanding of the Old Testament. All of these are here and important. But it is the replacement for Judas among the apostles that has my attention.

Now, to be sure, these earliest leaders were of a special nature. The text makes that clear. To be eligible to be an apostle, you had to have been with Jesus since the beginning and witnesses of the resurrection. That is a unique and small group. No one alive today can say that. Thus, by definition, there are no more apostles in this strict sense. There were only a limited number of people who fit that description. But, the principle still holds. Why did these disciples feel the need to replace Judas? Was "12" an important number to them? Then what about Paul?

The broader principle I see here is that the Church was designed to have multiple leaders, a group of people charged with being the keepers of the truth and leading the charge into unknown territory. It was never designed to get down to one or two. Again, on a local level here at Hillcrest, we seek to live out this principle. I may be the most visible leader, like Peter the spokesman in certain settings, but this church is led by a group of faithful and capable leaders. We move forward as a group. Even when Lowell was the only pastor, behind him was a group of leaders who jointly shared responsibility. Decisions were made jointly. No, I believe the Scriptures are quite clear that God's plan for His Church involves multiplicity of leaders.

In this passage, we see the first installment of the lessons on church leadership that comprise such an important part of the book of Acts. In other words, we would do well to ponder the details and message of the text in passages such as this. It would serve us well to understand God's perspective on leadership of His Church. (3 parts)

#### I. The believers jointly waited on God to act. vv. 12-14

There is a sense in which this whole passage happens during a pause. The disciples were told to sit and wait...and they did. I picture this in the same way as Noah being asked to get into the ark with all the animals, close up the door...and wait. For 7 days, Noah and his family obediently sat and waited for the indescribable, unbelievable to happen. For one hundred years he prepared, only to enter, have the door sealed behind him, and 7 days of waiting. I can only imagine what it was like to live through that. And I picture it quite similarly here. The disciples had just witnessed the indescribable, the unbelievable. I'm sure they were a mixture of "can't wait to tell" and "scared to death to tell." Surely they were both. But for now, they were to just sit and wait. All of the believers were huddled in one room, waiting. Just picture the scene here if you can.

v.12- Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. [13](#) When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

They returned from the scene of the ascension. As we highlighted last time, "Now what!" They walked the short distance (about 2/3 of a mile) and went to what seems to have been a familiar place to them. The wording here leads us to think the earliest readers of this book would have known where this place was. Perhaps it was where they celebrated Jesus' last supper?? There's no way to know. All we do know is that the disciples were all there. They are listed here so we might know. These 11 men were handpicked by Jesus, witnessed everything that had happened, heard all of the sermons and teaching of Jesus, watched in horror as Jesus was put to death, stood in disbelief at the scene of the resurrection, stood in awe as Jesus ascended into heaven, and now were put in charge. They were now the leaders in charge. The future of this greatest movement in the history of man was put in the hands of 11 men. What would they do now? The first thing? They gathered in a familiar, safe room for them. The disciples are listed by name. They were all there.

[14](#) They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Here we see what they were doing. They were praying. And from the wording, it seems there was an order, a structure to it. They were praying in an organized way. It was happening over an extended period of time. What do you do when you are told to sit and wait? How about praying!

Then we notice the inclusion of others who were there. This one is perhaps more instructive than it might first appear. You see, these 11 disciples were not the only ones gathered in that upper room. This was not a closed board meeting. This was a gathering of perhaps the whole church, or at least the core of that church. But notice specifically that there were women there. Mary, the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus' brothers were there.

Let's take them in order. We know from the gospels that Jesus had not just the 12, but a larger group of followers. We also know that He received support, whether hospitality or even money from prominent women. So, it ought not surprise us that in this first gathering of the Christian church there were women. Indeed, the inclusion of women seems to be a major point for Luke, both in his gospel and in Acts. And from the wording, we are led to believe they had an active role. In other words, when the selection of a new leader came about, it is told in third person plural, "THEY" proposed, "THEY" prayed. "Show US" who it is. So, there seems to have been an active role for women. Clearly, the text does not treat them as second class. They were full participants.

Then we see that Mary, the mother of Jesus is singled out for notice. Why? The text does not tell us. Indeed, this is the last mention of her name in the whole book. So, it does not seem to me that she is mentioned because of the prominent role she had in the unfolding of the church. In fact, it seems to me that her primary role in Scripture was to give birth to Jesus, and then to be mentioned as present at the crucifixion and here, the gathering of the first church. In other words, after giving birth and rearing Jesus, her primary role was as a witness. She was there, she believed, she was one of the earliest followers.

Then we notice Jesus' brothers. Now, we know from gospel texts that Jesus' brothers were skeptics during His earthly ministry. They were not sure Jesus was even in His right mind. But now, they are there. Again, as siblings, as skeptical brothers, their presence here speaks volumes. Jesus' brothers were early converts to the faith.

As we will see later in the text, there were about 120 people in that room: leaders and followers, men and women, disciples and family. I suspect they were crowded in that space. An upper room somewhere in Jerusalem big enough to comfortably hold 120 people does not seem to be a commodity. Just like Noah and his family on the ark, I picture them all present, all crowded in one place, all filled with wonder, awe, confusion, and anxiety, all spending the time praying to God, waiting for the unknown and unknowable. What a picture of the earliest church!

II. Things did not turn out well for Judas, the epitome of a bad leader. vv.15-20

As a setup to the selection of the new leader, Luke gives us the tragic end to Judas, the traitor.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

Did you notice who spoke up? Peter did. Why Peter? The text doesn't tell us. Surely it would have been natural for Peter to speak up. Peter was always speaking up for the others, usually by sticking his foot in his mouth. Perhaps it relates to Jesus' commissioning of Peter to "feed His sheep." Acts can be seen as the early church under the guidance of Peter, shifting to the church under the guidance of Paul. But notice as we go through the text that even though Peter leads, he does not dictate. Peter does not pick the next leader. Peter simply leads the group through the process.

16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— 17he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

I find it interesting that Peter frames the situation with Judas as a fulfilling of Scripture. It was very clear that Judas did something horrible, but it had to happen. God had ordained long ago that this take place. In other words, Peter could have stood up and blamed Judas for what had happened, but he did not. It was all by the plan of God. Jesus said a similar thing at the Last Supper (perhaps in the very same room!) "The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him." (Luke 22:22) It was not incompatible in the slightest that an evil man could do the most traitorous act and yet have God be sovereign over all of it. Oh how I wish more of us could more often share that perspective. Just because something bad happens, it doesn't mean God was not sovereign. Hey wait! That sounds like a lesson from the book of Job!!

But the practical aspect of the situation is that Judas had been one of the 12, the treasurer in fact, and he was gone. Notice the term "shared" in this context. Their whole ministry model was a shared experience. They did it together. I actually think this is quite insightful and important. So, one of their number did the despicable and betrayed their leader.

18 (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. 19 Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 “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.’

I don't want to spend too much time here. If you were to look at Matthew's account of the end of Judas' life in Matt.27, you might be perplexed when reading this section of Acts. There, Judas was filled with remorse, returned the money and the priests bought a field. Here Judas bought it himself. So, did Judas give the money back and then hang himself? Or, did he buy some land and then die on it? Scholars cannot agree on it. I actually think both accounts tell us the truth. He probably returned the money and later hanged himself. Meanwhile the priests used the money to buy a field where Judas' body was disposed. Who knows, but I don't want to focus on something we cannot know for sure.

Peter then quotes from two Psalms: 69 and 109. In these Psalms, the man of God is betrayed by His enemies. You can easily see why Peter would quote from them. It is not that these psalms were only pointing to this situation, but that they convey the sentiments of God in such a situation. Such enemies of the man of God ought to die in isolation and someone else be raised up to take their place. Now, I am sure a few of you have seen as I have the last verse quoted as a wish in the realm of politics, “May his days be few, may another take his place of leadership.” (Psalm 109:8) I think that is what you call taking a verse out of context!

But the principle extracted by Peter out of these verses is that it will end badly for the enemies of God, and that God will raise up others to take their places. That is the lesson drawn from the text. Peter then applies it to the vacancy among the 12.

III. Decisions over leadership need to be joint decisions, with room for God to reveal His choice. vv. 21-26

As I've already noted, I see here not the formula for leader transitions, but principles that would serve the Church well to adopt and adapt. And actually, the process is a bit messy, even here in Acts I.

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 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."

Because there is an empty seat, it needs to be filled. A new leader needs to be chosen. Why it is necessary is not expressed. They could have served with 11 apostles. I actually think there was more than one reason. I think they took the principle from Psalm 109 to heart. That text spoke to them, guided them. Then I think they saw significance in the number 12, a full and complete number. Then I think they were trying to continue the model Jesus set before them, they were known as "the 12." You couldn't have 11 of "the 12."

But for us, I think the principle is multiple, shared leadership. The pattern being laid down is that the people of God have but 1 leader, or Lord. And yet, the pattern for leadership is multiplicity, sustained multiplicity with shared responsibilities. The Church was never intended to be like a dictatorship, with one leader calling the shots. The Church was to be a group, with several leaders fulfilling their roles. We will see this principle made even more clear in chapter 6.

What I see here of note are the qualifications laid out for the position and the process used to select such a person. The position they were filling was for the 12. Who would or could fill that role? Well, they had to have been there from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Why? So they could testify about that which Jesus said and did. Their role was as eye witnesses. In fact, I almost made as my main point, "Witnesses witness!" Their primary role was to serve as witnesses. Jesus said that back in v.8, "You will be My witnesses." So, to qualify, they had to have been there.

The second qualification was that they had to be there at the end, the resurrection. Probably the most controversial event they would need to defend is that Jesus rose from the dead. So, to be a witness at this level, you had to have been there when they went into the empty tomb, when they saw the risen Christ. So, to be qualified as an apostle, you had to be there from beginning to end of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Pause: I know some of you are jumping ahead to the Apostle Paul. Under such a qualification system, Paul would not qualify. But he admits that he doesn't qualify. He had to rely on the information from others (1 Cor. 15:3-5) and He calls himself,

one abnormally born.”(I Cor. 15:8) He goes on to say he is the least of the apostles. And yet, he qualifies under the next section: he was called and chosen by Jesus.

23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen

There it is: “Show us which of these two you have chosen.” Notice the choosing by Jesus was already completed, “you HAVE chosen.” Under the qualification guidelines, two men rose in their thinking: Barsabbas and Matthias. Both fit the criteria. But just because they were qualified doesn’t mean they had the right to fill that position. There had to be room for God to choose. Again, I hope you can see the distinction in principle I am trying to make. I see this text as not simply telling us what happened, but how it happened which then gives us help in handling such situations ourselves. I do not see it as us having to comply with every detail, but to use their process as a model of our own.

Here, two names rise to the top, both were qualified. Then they prayed. They submitted the situation to God. They asked God to see what they could not see (reveal everyone’s heart) and show them who He wanted in that position. They left it up to God’s providence. In their case it was the casting of lots, or drawing straws if you like. From my perspective, the exact means of doing this is not the essential part. What matters is seeking out God’s choice and then providing a way for God to make it known. (Can you imagine if we chose a president this way!)

25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” 26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

The ministry was essential. The position needed to be filled. Judas betrayed that position and suffered the consequences. Now it was time for his replacement to be chosen. And the Lord chose Matthias, which is the last time he is mentioned in Acts

or indeed all of the New Testament as is true of most of the 12. We know nothing more about him.

I take from this that Matthias was not mentioned here because he went on to go great things or become a great hero. He was selected to fill a role and he did. End of story. What we see here for us is how the earliest church chose its leaders using multiple criteria, with prayer, and leaving the ultimate decision up to God.

Can you see how this ought to guide us? What if we made everyone a leader? What if we simply did it by chance? What if we did it by popularity contest? What if we simply had just one leader? What if the leaders simply picked their own successors? Hmmmm!

That's not what we have here. Peter spoke up, organizing the process. Names were brought forward. The people had a role in the process. They all prayed. They left the ultimate decision up to God. The Church has leaders. Jesus has witnesses! Problem solved!

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will wait patiently, prayerfully when called upon by God to do so.
- 2) We will organize ourselves with multiple sustaining leadership.
- 3) We will use a process to select leaders that involves all the people, qualifications and job descriptions, prayer, and room for God to reveal His choice.
- 4) When chosen, we will be faithful to our positions.