

Acts 1:15-26

¹⁵In those days, when the group there numbered about 120 people, Peter stood up among the brothers and said, ¹⁶“Gentlemen, brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David about Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷Judas was counted as one of us and was given a share in this ministry.

¹⁸“Now this man acquired a field with what he was paid for his wicked act. When he fell headfirst, his middle burst open, and all his intestines spilled out. ¹⁹This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, and so in their own language that field was called Akeldema, which means Field of Blood. ²⁰Indeed, it is written in the book of Psalms:

May his residence be deserted.

Let there be no one dwelling in it.

And,

let someone else take his position.

²¹“Therefore it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us during the entire time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from his baptism by John until the day Jesus was taken up from us, become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

²³They proposed two: Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place.”

²⁶Then they assigned lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias. So he was counted with the eleven apostles.

The Twelfth Man

I.

What an emotional roller coaster it had been! Some of the deepest lows had been followed by the highest highs. The little group had been meeting regularly to discuss the situation.

Horror and disbelief. That’s how this emotional turmoil had begun. They had held such high expectations. Their leader was the One. They had been sure of it. But then their hopes and dreams were dashed. He was taken from them in the most awful way possible.

They couldn’t quite believe the news some of the group was bringing back a few days later. Despite having heard from his own mouth that he would rise from the dead, it didn’t seem to be possible. Euphoria set in when they realized their Jesus was alive again! Nothing could dampen their spirits after they finally realized he had risen from the dead, just as he had told them he would.

The directive had been to wait a bit. He said to them: “Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49, EHV).

You could say it had been easy for them to focus on the problems of the day. The religious establishment wanted to suppress the news about Jesus’ resurrection, whether they believed it or not. *Their* power and authority were in jeopardy. The pressure was on the followers of Jesus to conform to the societal norms—to renounce Jesus.

A few days ago we held our Ascension worship. There we heard the disciples ask the Lord Jesus: “Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

(Acts 1:6, EHV). Even after being with Jesus on a daily basis during his earthly ministry and having a front-row seat to his execution and resurrection, *still* they were captive to the prevailing attitudes about the Messiah. They still thought he would be a political figure. They still thought the nation of Israel would be restored to a prominent position among the nations—and even *above* the other nations.

They thought he would solve all their current problems. He didn't. We listened to Jesus tell them: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, EHV). Then, slack-jawed they watched him rise up into the clouds and out of sight.

Wait, he had said. Even after his ascension, they were to wait. There was something else. He said they were to be his witnesses. "In those days, when the group there numbered about 120 people..." (Acts 1:15, EHV). "Those days" were the days following Jesus' ascension. There had always been a larger group of disciples than the inner group we often think of. 72 disciples had been sent out to tell others about Jesus (Luke 10).

But now, due to the tragic events of Holy Week, the inner group had a missing member.

II.

"Peter stood up among the brothers and said,¹⁶"Gentlemen, brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David about Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus" (Acts 1:15-16, EHV). Judas became a "guide," Peter said. A guide. Usually guide is such a positive word. You follow a guide through a museum so you can get interesting tidbits of information. You hire a guide when you embark on certain kinds of vacations—the guide knows the hot spots and the pitfalls; you are guided *to* the good stuff and away from or around the bad stuff.

You learned in Catechism classes that one of the three uses of God's Law is called a guide. It isn't the use of the Law that points out our sins and the fact that we deserve punishment, the Law as a guide is for the believer—we are *guided* by the Law to live God-pleasing lives.

Judas, by contrast, was a guide for evil. Judas allowed the god of his greed to take over his life. The almighty denarius was what he centered his life around. He didn't care how his greed was affecting the rest of his life or his relationships; just get more money and the things it could buy. And so, Judas became a guide to death. Judas guided the enemies of Jesus right to him; he planted a kiss on the cheek of Jesus. You could call Judas a minister of death.

The thing is, Judas was not the only one who sinned. Not by a long shot. *All* the disciples participated in the handing over of Jesus to death. Peter gets prominent mention, of course. Peter denied three times that he even *knew* Jesus. All eleven of the rest of the disciples ran away from the trouble in Gethsemane, leaving Jesus to face his arrest and his trial all alone.

John, who is called the disciple whom Jesus loved, followed along at a distance and went to witness the trial. He even made sure his buddy Peter was able to get in to the High Priest's courtyard. But did John ever even open his mouth to defend Jesus? Nope. Silence.

Even on Easter, when Jesus rose from the dead, they all had various levels of disbelief. Thomas is the well-known doubter, but they *all* refused to believe the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection until they, too, were among the eyewitnesses. It wasn't really just Thomas whom Jesus was chiding when he said: "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29, EHV).

It was nothing new. The devil not only convinced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, he convinced Adam to just stand there in silence rather than to guide her away from a dangerous situation. The devil not only enticed the Children of Israel to demand a golden calf to worship, he even convinced Aaron, the priest of God, to silently *accede* to their demands and create the mold for the idol himself. The devil not only convinced Judas to betray Jesus with a kiss, but the apostles to flee in fear—and then to remain silent in fear of persecution.

The silence of Jesus' disciples in the face of adversity continues sometimes, doesn't it? How easy it is to keep silent when Christianity is being abused. Sidle off to the corner and maybe no one will notice you—you won't be forced to endure the scorn of those who think Christianity is just a crutch for the weak. Lack of defense of Jesus and his teachings against sin is the same as John keeping silent, or Peter denying, or Thomas insisting on seeing with his own eyes, or the rest of them running away to leave Jesus alone to defend himself, if he so chose.

III.

“In those days, when the group there numbered about 120 people, Peter stood up” (Acts 1:15, EHV). “In those days.” Now...after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, the disciples were finally beginning to understand more about what Jesus had come to do. Jesus had been the sacrifice necessary for sin.

Sin didn't just separate *Judas* from God, it separates *every* human being from God. Sin is what caused Jesus to die—the sins of everyone.

Judas had become the guide who betrayed Jesus. Then, in despair, he committed suicide. Despair over sin can lead to absolute disaster.

Peter, on the other hand, repented of his sin. He wept bitterly. Jesus restored him. Thomas confessed “My Lord and my God.” Thomas was likewise restored. You and I sin every day. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9, EHV). God is faithful. He assured us with Jesus' resurrection and ascension that our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God has been restored.

IV.

Addressing the leadership team, Peter says: “It is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us during the entire time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from his baptism by John until the day Jesus was taken up from us, become a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22, EHV). The qualifications to be one of the Twelve apostles who had been the inner circle of disciples were that he would be a solid follower of Jesus who had been around from the beginning; he was to have witnessed all the things in Jesus' ministry and was to have been there also at his ascension.

The new member of the team of twelve was to be an additional witness to the power of Christ and his resurrection. This new member was to have been one who followed the Lord, not by chance or by his own decision. It wasn't even someone who was to have shown by his own commitment that he was dedicated to service. It was to be the call of the Lord.

The slate of candidates had two names. They prayed about the list. “Lord, you know

everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place" (Acts 1:24-25, EHV).

Then it was time to find out the result. "Then they assigned lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias. So he was counted with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26, EHV). It isn't certain whether the procedure was to draw straws or to cast a ballot, but either way, just as we do when calling someone to be a church worker today, they left the result in the Lord's hand. Matthias was identified as the one chosen by God, but this is the last time he is mentioned in the Bible.

When Matthias was elected to replace Judas, one simple truth is learned: the ministry of Jesus himself will continue on earth. Silence will not prevail. The disciples were gearing up for what Jesus promised at his ascension: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, EHV).

It is because of the power of the Holy Spirit that the message about Jesus went out from the time of Pentecost onward. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that has brought the message of Jesus and his gift of salvation to us. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that descends on his ministers today to proclaim that gospel. It is the power of the Holy Spirit which enables us to *not* be silent, but to speak in defense of our Lord Jesus and all he has done.

The twelfth man, Judas, was gone. The guide of evil was replaced by Matthias, another guide in the band of guides who carried the gospel into the future.

O Lord, continue to inspire us to be guides into *our* future. Move our hearts, and fill our very beings with your Holy Spirit. Amen.