

Scripture Reading:

Acts 1: "12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. 15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, 16 "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; 17 for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."

18 (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. 19 And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.'
<http://www.biblestudytools.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?new=1&word=Acts+1§ion=0&version=nkj&language=en-F6> 21 "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." 23 And they proposed two: Joseph called Bar-Sabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen 25 to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." 26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles. "

"Choosing the 12th Apostle"

This morning we consider the first action taken by the new Church that Jesus has tasked with carrying His Kingdom to the ends of the earth! There will be some rich lessons for us in this portion of Scripture that sits quietly between the wonders of the Ascension of Jesus to the Father's right hand and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The eleven disciples are named again and as they approach an important decision, we see an example that we should strive to follow today:

In verse 14 Luke tells us that, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

- They were of one mind
- They were in prayer

We will see the fruitful results of such unity and prayer in our text this morning. As we consider this text, I think it is important for us to ask where we see such unity and prayer today...

- Do we see it in our families?
- Do we see it in our church?
- Do we see it in the broader church here in the Sacramento valley or across our nation?

If we are honest, I think we must say that we see it seldom if at all...

- Being of one accord and taking matters before the throne of grace should be a priority for all those who are in Christ...

This means that couples must take the time to know each other, to study together and have long discussions about what they believe and what they see as the Lord's direction for their marriage and family

- There are no Vulcan mind-melds or shortcuts for Biblical unity in our marriages!

[as a quick aside, it is telling that in our modern world, you will find Valcan in the Microsoft spell-check dictionary while sixty of the seventy nations of the earth from Genesis chapter ten are not!]

- The point is that there is no easy path to being of one mind as a couple and this same challenge is then extended to the children that God may give your family.
- We have these early Saints as our example: They did not just gather together and say OK, lets be of one mind

-- Most, if not all of them, had been raised in faithful Jewish homes, instructed in the Scriptures.

-- They had spent some or all of the past three years listening to and wrestling with the teachings and the example of Jesus

-- Jesus had then spent the forty days after His resurrection showing them many proofs of His resurrection and how the Old Testament Scriptures come alive when we see Jesus in them!

- Yes, they could now be of one mind, but it did not fall upon them out of thin air: They desired it!
- AND their unity was the result of many years of teaching and discussions!

A couple which does not take the time to really know one another & to wrestle TOGETHER with the truths of the faith, will find it very difficult to be of “one mind” when they suddenly face a serious financial crisis or even a death in the family.

- AND there must be a willingness to approach God in prayer as a united couple or family
- There must not just be talk about prayer, but much prayer!

Now these same principles can be extended to the local church:

- Here at Church of the King we are of one-mind on many matters and often, though not nearly often enough, take our needs and desires before the throne of Grace.

However, we must remember that we have just seen our fifth anniversary this past week, meaning that we have had five years of worship services, fellowship meals, Bible studies, women’s studies, feasts and festivals where we have learned to work together and to grow in the unity of the faith.

- While there is MUCH room for improvement, consider where we would be if we had not put our focus on the gathering together of the Saints?

And finally, the place where we really need to come before the Lord with repentant hearts is when we consider the broader Church. Even taking a small geographical area like the Sacramento Valley leaves us with little but shame?

- We, as the Body of Christ, cannot find it in ourselves to be of one-mind on just about anything
- We don’t agree on how the Body of Christ should serve those in need
- We can’t even agree on how the Body of Christ should denounce the scandalous sins of our day!
- Just imagine if the Body of Christ in our area was called upon to make the kind of decision we see the early Saints facing in our text this morning?

Lets take a moment and consider what these early Saints did as a result of their unity and prayer:

- They could unite to face a difficult challenge with the devastating loss of one of the twelve chosen by Jesus.
- They could turn to the Scriptures for guidance on how to handle the matter
- They could trust God to help them make the right decision.

As the disciples and others returned to Jerusalem they did face a big challenge: What to do with the open position left by Judas’ betrayal?

- Jesus had chosen the twelve and they were to rule the twelve tribes of Israel and their names would be on the foundation of the New Jerusalem.

Peter's rises and shows they have begun to learn the lessons that Jesus had been teaching them: "Men and brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled!" After missing so much about what the Bible had to say regarding the mission and final days of Jesus' life, they now begin to apply the wisdom of the Scriptures...

- Those Scriptures which were written by the Spirit who was coming to them in power in just a few days...

Again, we will see this time and time again in the Book of Acts as the Apostles open and explain the Old Testament so we can see Jesus.

The fact that the Old Testament spoke about the betrayal of Judas brings comfort to the Saints...

- His betrayal was not a surprise to God!

Luke recounts the tragic end of Judas so that we can remember that we are always responsible for our actions... Even when they are evil actions that are used by God in His foreordained plan of salvation!

Peter can now turn to the Psalms for help in understanding what has happened and what must be done...

- The office has been vacated and it needs to be filled.

I think we can safely assume that Jesus had shown Peter these passages and explained that it would fall to the Saints to make this important decision.

Jesus could easily have picked the replacement for Judas... Just as He could easily use the angels of heaven or His own power to take His Kingdom to the four corners of the earth.

- BUT, that is not what God has chosen to do and this selection of the 12th Apostle begins to teach them how to be the Church and still teaches us down to this day!

Peter, again I suspect with some guidance from Jesus during those forty days, then tells us the qualifications for an Apostle: They had to be with Jesus for His entire ministry and witnesses of His resurrection.

It is NOT possible for anyone living today to meet EITHER of these qualifications and thus anyone claiming the title of Apostle must be considered a false prophet

As we shall see in a moment, Paul teaches us that Apostles were given first to the church and we see throughout the New Testament that they laid the foundation of the Church based on the Chief Cornerstone which is Jesus.

- With no further basis given for evaluating any candidates: We can assume that Joseph called Bar-SA-bas and Matthias were the only two who met these qualifications

We then see another example of God's sovereignty working together with man's free will as they cast lots to determine which of the two will serve in the place of Judas.

- As it says in Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the Lord."

There is ultimately no chance in our God's universe: When we roll the dice, we have no way to know the outcome, thus it is chance to us...

But the outcome is no secret to God!

- Thus, when faced with two qualified candidates and only one office, the disciples could confidently cast random lots knowing that God would control the outcome.

This would not have seemed strange:

-- Moses instructs the people to divide the land of Canaan among the tribes by lot in Numbers 26 and we see this carried out by Joshua.

-- The sin of Achan is found out by choosing the tribe and family by lot

-- Armies to punish Benjamin were chosen by lot in Judges 20

-- Jonathan's violation of Saul command was found out by lot in I Samuel 14

- This is why the Proverbs teach that man may cast lots, but God determines the outcome.

Some argue that this is not practiced after the Spirit is poured out on the Church. However, there is no place where it is forbidden and the truth of Proverbs 16:33 is just as valid today as it was in the time of King Solomon. As it is with all things in our fallen world, there MUCH abuse and sin regarding the subject of chance or foretelling the future...

- Think of all the Astrology, fortune-telling and gambling that pretends to be seeking God's knowledge and favor.

However, is it wrong to flip a coin to determine which team will have the home field advantage when two Christians teams play softball?

- Can we not trust God as these early Saints did with a decision where we have no human way to make a further choice?

Thus Matthias was chosen as the 12th Apostle...

- Now some want to argue that the disciples should have waited because the Holy Spirit was going to anoint Paul for that spot... However, Paul did not meet either criteria and he himself says that while He was chosen by Jesus as the Apostle to the Gentiles, he was like one born out of time.

These Saints were united and in prayer, an example for us all! We saw earlier how we need this unity and prayer in our marriages, families and even our local church.

- These early Saints met as THE CHURCH
- I am sure we all would struggle to even try and think that such unity would be possible in the broader church today...

However, we must NOT think this applies only to the early days of the Church and that there is no way to have that type of unity today or even in the earthy future of the Church . We should consider what the Apostle Paul commands the Church at Ephesus to focus on BEFORE he gives all the practical commands for marriage, children and work that hundreds if not thousands of books have been written about.

Eph 4: "1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

- Paul could not be much clearer:
If we are to walk worthy of our calling, we must strive to KEEP the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
- We have recommended a series of lectures on Reformed Catholicity to many as a challenge to think through what Paul is saying here, and in them Pastor Wilson points out that here we see a unity that is GIVEN: Not a unity that we try to build or design, but rather a unity that the Spirit of God has given and will defend.

Paul goes on to clearly explain what that unity is:

4 "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

- We often talk about the Apostle's Creed being the bottom-line test of Orthodoxy...
- I think you can see that this tracks very closely with what Paul says...
- The Church of Jesus is, and has always been, united around one Lord, one faith, one baptism" a unity that is given to us and that we are to strive to maintain.

To fail to do so is sin, plain and simple and thus the Church in America has much to confess!

- Paul also says there is a unity that is not yet, a unity that we are to work toward in the Church
- In fact, Paul uses the doctrine of the ascension that we have been studying to confirm this truth...

7 “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.” 9 (Now this, “He ascended”-- what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)”

- This Jesus who came to save His people from their sins, now sits in Heaven where He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords...
- And He will fill the earth with His Kingdom through His Church and Paul goes on to explain how...

11 “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

- Just as Jesus had brought these disciples along to the point where they are now acting as mature members of His Church
- So it must be with us, and thus Paul says we too must leave the old ways behind...

14 “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

We are to speak the truth in love...

- There is to be no compromise with the world or with false teachers, but our confrontation is to be in love...
- And Paul makes very clear what this love should look like in verse 29: “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

Beginning in chapter five Paul will outline the important and familiar instructions to men & women, children and workers

BUT these are not instructions given to a bunch of individuals who are to go their own way, showing everyone else just how right they can be!

No, these instructions if lived out by the Body of Christ will bring forth the “unity of the faith” which is not the unity that was given, but the mature church that is yet future:

- The glorified bride that the Father is preparing for His Son

This is not just the future glory of the Church when we have our resurrected bodies...

Jesus desires, no commands, an obedient church that is carrying out His Great Commission by obeying the commands He has given Her

These are not impossible commands, ... just ones we resist in our flesh!

When obeyed they will bring us that much closer to the day when the Kingdom of Jesus will fill the whole earth:

- It all begins with those in Christ sincerely and earnestly desiring & striving to be of one accord and being constantly in prayer!

Communion Meditation: Ephesians 4:30-32

“30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.””