

7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 24, a.D. 2009
Acts 1: 15 – 26

In the Revelation of Jesus Christ to St. John, the last book of the bible, the number of believers on earth is sealed at 144,000. 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes in Israel equals 144,000. In the book of Genesis, the first book of the bible, the Lord called the twelve tribes, the sons of Jacob, the whole family of Israel, to be his covenant people. 12 makes a complete family, all God's people gathered into one community, the full portion of his faithful people.

The fullness and wholeness of God's people was shattered in the Old Testament when one of the tribes named Dan, turned away from the Lord God. The fellowship of God's Israel is broken. The twelve is now eleven. It is incomplete.

The outward appearance of unity and completeness might be maintained, but what is broken cannot make itself whole again. Sin cannot be undone, except if God himself should do it. How would God make his people one again? He has promised it.

During the days that immediately followed Jesus' ascension, the Eleven and the other disciples, numbering around 120, awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit by devoting themselves to prayer. Their prayer arose from studying the Word of God together.

Passages from Psalm 69 and 109 came to Peter's attention. Here was a word from the Lord to direct their action. As Israel had been broken and scattered because of sin, so too, the apostolic circle had been broken by the sin of Judas Iscariot. The twelve were now only the Eleven. The full number of the Twelve must be restored.

Judas had to be replaced to give the Lord his twelve again. "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 men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." (vv21-22 ESV)

Why only one witness more? Why not add both Matthias and Barsabbas? If this were simply adding more witnesses, than wouldn't 13 be better than 12? And if you read further, the number of those who proclaim the resurrection would swell as Barnabas and Paul and Apollos joined in.

Jesus chose twelve men at the beginning of his earthly ministry. The number of Israel was full once again and made one in Christ to follow him faithfully. Their unity was broken by the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, shattering the oneness.

Sin breaks the fellowship. It drives us away from God and away from one another. The restoration of the Twelve is the very picture of the Lord's saving work. His death breaks the power of sin and his resurrection proclaims healing for the broken. Christ has reconciled those driven apart by sin.

Therefore, filling the place that was deserted by Judas restored the full number to 12. Not only did this add one more witness, it shows the power of our Lord's resurrection by making his people whole again, his new people Israel, that is the church.

God's people are made one by Christ's saving work.

The man who would complete the number of twelve needed to be an eyewitness of the Lord's resurrection. He would have followed the Lord's calling to take up his cross and follow.

There were two that met these apostolic qualifications: Joseph also known as Barsabbas, which in Latin is Justus and Matthias. We know nothing about them. They are strangers to us. What is important about them is that Jesus called both of them. They faithfully followed him.

Now the church had a problem. Which of the two was going to make up the Lord's 12? They cast lots. For this important decision? Isn't that like throwing dice or drawing straws? Why doesn't the church strike a committee to conduct personal interviews and then discuss it thoroughly and finally elect by secret ballot? That would seem more reasonable to us.

The simple answer is that the church is not making the choice. Nor is it left to good luck or blind fate. The choice is not in the hands of men. Even men who have prayed to God for help so that they can choose the right one. No, it is out of their hands. God's choice is Matthias.

Now this word of Holy Scripture is not mandating the casting of lots in our meetings, nor is it a manual to show how to run a congregation, but it does tell us how to seek direction from God. God's will is found in searching his written words. Why is it that we in the church act as if everything depends on the democratic process of voting

and give all power to the voters' assembly? Having voters is fine, that is not the problem. The question is whose will is to be done, the voters' or God's? Shouldn't the bible serve as our guide even in all of the church's meetings?

God demonstrated his choice in Matthias. God restores his twelve. This is the fruit of the saving death and resurrection of our Lord. Israel is made whole in Christ. We don't hear anything more about Matthias. All our attention in the bible is now directed toward to Christ active in his church and the power of his resurrection.

God's twelve is still at work in the church today as pastors and missionaries take the Gospel into the world, inviting all to the Baptism that incorporates us into Christ, making us members of his body, announcing the forgiveness of all sin, calling the penitent to oneness in Christ and through the eating of his body and drinking of his blood, we taste of God's goodness and see that we are one in Him.

Go and live in our Lord's victorious resurrection.