

Waiting, Praying, and Trusting

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Acts 1:12-26

June 25, 2023 Sermon

Today is our second sermon from "The Acts of the Apostles."

Before I read our text, let me remind you what we saw last week in the first 11 verses of this book.

Jesus told the apostles in verse 8:

8 "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;

and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus tells the apostles that they will "receive power."

The apostles required God's power so they can preach and teach and navigate the challenges of creating a new spiritual community called the church.

I told you last week that this is the most-important verse in the entire Book of Acts.

Because in one sentence, Jesus describes everything that happens in the next 27 chapters.

Verse 8 also describes HOW those things happen: by the power of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

As we study this book in the months ahead, we will see how the church expanded exactly as Jesus said it would.

Now let's turn our attention to today's passage from God's Word, in Acts 1:12-26.

12 "Then the apostles 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.

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

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

16 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.

17 He was one of our number and shared in our ministry."

18 (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.

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.'

21 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,

22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us.

23 So they nominated 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

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."

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Please pray with me.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth.

Jesus, we worship you because you are full of mercy and love.

Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God, amen.

What do you do when you are waiting for something?

Some people like to distract themselves with movies or games.

Some people take a nap.

Other people stay busy, doing something to pass the time.

Waiting can be hard.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit.

But they didn't know how long they would have to wait.

I think some of us would be tempted to go back to our jobs.

Maybe those who are committed to evangelism would start traveling to spread the good news.

But Jesus said to wait.

Look again at verse 14 with me:

14 "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."

What did the apostles and other believers do while they waited?

They prayed, constantly.

Just a few weeks earlier, the apostles had a weak prayer life.

Jesus asked them to pray with him, the night before his crucifixion.

But the apostles fell asleep, repeatedly, instead of praying with Jesus as he requested.

A few weeks later, something has changed in the apostles.

Now they are addicted to prayer.

The resurrection of Jesus gave them a new understanding about his identity.

The apostles had a new hope, and a hunger for spiritual communication with God.

That's why they started a prayer meeting immediately after Jesus ascended to heaven.

And they kept praying for 10 days, until the Spirit came.

My friends, our faith grows stronger when we wait on the Lord.

I think most of us run toward our problems, or we run away from our problems.

We want to fix things or avoid them.

It is hard for us to wait for God.

Maybe that's why Jesus wanted the believers to wait for 10 days.

They were not inactive.

They were actively praying, actively trusting Jesus to do the things he promised to do.

That is how our faith grows.

The 11 apostles were not the only ones in this prayer meeting.

Mary the mother of Jesus was there, and Mary's other sons--the brothers of Jesus.

Notice that Mary was a member of the congregation.

Mary was the mother of the Messiah, but also a disciple of the Messiah.

Mary's Son died for her sins, too.

Verse 14 also tells us that "the women" were there.

We know some of these women's names from Luke's first book.

He wrote this in Luke 8:1-3.

1 "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

The Twelve were with him,

2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases:

Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;

3 Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others.

These women were helping to support them out of their own means."

These women were very close to Jesus and important for the foundation of the church.

They generously shared their financial resources to fund the ministry.

These ladies were among the 120 believers who were gathered together, praying for the Holy Spirit to come.

As they waited, the believers also studied God's Word to discern God's will.

Listen again to verses 15-17:

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

16 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.

17 He was one of our number and shared in our ministry."

Peter is interpreting current events through the lens of scripture.

He says in verse 16 that the Holy Spirit spoke through David when David wrote psalms.

This is one of the marvelous mysteries of God's Word.

In Psalm 23 David wrote "The Lord is my Shepherd."

David wrote from his experience as a shepherd about God who is the Good Shepherd.

But David's words were also God's Words.

David was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write poetry that was also scripture.

Hundreds of years later, the Holy Spirit revealed something to the early church about Judas, in the poetry of David.

In verse 20, Peter quotes from Psalm 69:25 and 109:8.

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.’

Peter and the other believers spent 10 days praying and studying scripture.

That's how Peter discovered truth about their current situation in the words of King David.

How did Peter the fisherman become a theologian?

Listen to what Jesus told the apostles in Luke 24:44-45.

44 "He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you:

Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."

The entire Bible is the trustworthy Word of God, my friends.

The Old Testament was full of prophecies that were fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The apostles understood this when Jesus opened their minds.

This is why we pray before we begin a sermon.

A human preacher cannot open your minds to understand the Scriptures.

We all depend upon the Holy Spirit to give light to our eyes and understanding to our hearts.

Now let's look at what Peter said about the understanding he received from the Holy Spirit, in verses 21-22:

21 "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,

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."

Do you have a resume?

A document that describes what you have done, your education, and qualifications?

Some of you are currently sending your resume around to different employers, trying to get a job.

You are hoping that an employer will recognize that you have the right qualifications for the job.

What are the right qualifications for an apostle?

Peter explained that the person had to be an eyewitness.

That's why we don't have apostles today.

The twelfth apostle had to be a man who saw and heard everything Jesus did during his three years of ministry.

Luke is careful to record these qualifications, because Luke's faith was built on the testimony of the 12 apostles.

Luke wrote this book of Acts, and one of the four Gospel accounts about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The other three Gospel accounts were written by disciples who were also eyewitnesses.

Matthew, Mark, and John walked and talked with Jesus for three years.

Luke was not there--he learned the truth about Jesus from the 12.

Luke teaches us that you don't have to "see it to believe it."

Luke's faith was built on the testimony of reliable witnesses, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you are still exploring Christianity, and wondering if you can believe all these things.

Maybe you are not sure that Jesus really died for your sins, and rose from the dead to give you eternal life.

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind to understand and believe.

We can trust the testimony of the 12 apostles, as recorded carefully by Luke.

But we also need the Spirit's work to give us eyes to see and hearts to believe.

Let's look at what happened next, in verses 23-26:

23 So they nominated 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

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."

Who chose Matthias to be an apostle?

According to these verses, it was Jesus Christ, and the Body of Christ.

The members of this young church looked around at the group, and they nominated Barsabbas and Matthias.

But the church did not make the decision alone.

They prayed that Jesus would make the decision about his twelfth apostle.

Sometime soon, we will elect elders and deacons to serve as officers of One Voice Fellowship.

Who will choose those men?

Jesus Christ, and the Body of Christ.

If you are a member, you will have the opportunity to nominate and vote for the men that Jesus chooses.

Please continue to pray with us about the leadership development group that has been meeting with me since December.

Pray that Jesus will make it clear to those men, and to you, who he has chosen.

Verse 26 tells us that they "cast lots" to discover which man Jesus wanted to serve as an apostle.

We don't know exactly what they used, maybe a stone or marked sticks.

It was something like flipping a coin.

The purpose was to leave a decision in God's hands.

I'll share one example of using lots in the Old Testament.

David was establishing the first temple in Jerusalem.

Many people wanted the opportunity to serve in worship at the temple.

In 1 Chronicles 25:7-8 we learn how the decision was made about the musicians:

7 "Along with their relatives--all of them trained and skilled in music for the Lord--they numbered 288.

8 Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties."

One other verse from the Old Testament is helpful to explain the purpose of lots, in Proverbs 16:33.

33 "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

God told his people to use lots in the Old Testament, to discover God's will.

But after this event in Acts chapter 1, lots are never used again the Bible.

Lots were used to choose Mathias, because the church was still waiting for the Holy Spirit to come and be their guide.

Next week's sermon is about Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

After Pentecost, Jesus ruled over the church through the Holy Spirit.

Christians do not need to flip a coin or cast lots to make decisions.

Because Jesus works through groups of Spirit-filled leaders to make decisions and to lead the church.

Notice also that Peter did not make decisions by himself in this situation.

The people did not ask Peter to choose between Barsabbas and Matthias.

In the book of Acts, we will see how Peter made important decisions in partnership with other leaders.

And that's how we make decisions here at One Voice.

Every human leader makes mistakes and continues to sin.

We all have a limited understanding of what is best, because of our personality and culture.

That's why biblical church leadership is always shared leadership.

We are going to elect elders and deacons soon at One Voice.

But Jesus is the head of One Voice and the true pastor of our church.

To make decisions as a team, we must study the scriptures and pray, just as the early church did.

That is how we discover Christ's will and purpose for our church.

If we wait for him, he will speak to us through the Word and the Holy Spirit.

Now let's end our time in God's Word by praying together:

Jesus, you are the head of the church.

We depend on you for direction, for power, and for love to unite us as brothers and sisters.

Thank you for giving us those gifts, through the Holy Spirit.

Help us wait for you to lead, and to pray without ceasing.

So that we may do all things for your glory alone.

We pray in Christ's name, amen.