

“CHOSEN BY GOD TO SERVE!”

Acts 1:15-17; 21-26

For many students, graduation is right around the corner. The next 4 weeks will make or break you. Your assignments need to be done. Your essays must be finished. Your exams are waiting to be written. And when that’s all finished, you’ll walk across a stage to receive your diploma and then celebrate at your picnic party in the park. But then what? You’ve been in school most of your life. Going to class is all you know. After graduation, the routine changes and out into the workforce OR back to school you go hoping to use something that you’ve learned.

After 3 years of schooling by Professor Jesus Christ, the apostles were taught everything they had to know. They **saw** Jesus’ life, they **witnessed** his suffering and death – albeit from a distance. They **observed** one colleague go off the deep end and another get real close – until tears of repentance flowed. Now the routine changed and it was time to put their training into practice in the church’s mission.

Today is the 7th & final Sunday of Easter. We celebrated Ascension in a rousing service last Thursday and observe Pentecost next weekend. The disciples finished their training and were given their apostolic diplomas by Jesus before He departed on his return trip to heaven. For three years, they were **disciples** (students) of Christ. Now Jesus called them to be **apostles** (Gospel messengers sent by God).

Were they alone in their work? Was the Christian Church destined to stand or fall on their plans and programs? No, for Jesus said **He was with them always to the very end of the age**. Our text shows that although Jesus is not with his church visibly, he is still with his church miraculously to:

- 1) Provide the message
- 2) Call the messengers

Like the disciples, today we too are:

“CHOSEN BY GOD TO SERVE!”

1

Our text begins with a problem. Luke writes, **“In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 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—he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.’”** Judas, one of the original twelve apostles, was no longer an apostle. On Thursday night of Holy Week, he betrayed Jesus, disclosing his location to his enemies. It wasn’t long after that Judas realized what he had done and hung himself in despair. You heard the gory details of Judas’ suicide from our first lesson. The bottom line is the apostles were now missing one from their number.

One could argue that there wasn’t a reason to replace Judas and you’d probably be right. But God wanted a replacement for Judas. The proof comes when Peter quotes two different verses from the Psalms. We heard the first verse from **Psalm 69, v 25: “May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it.”** The other quote came from **Psalm 109, v 8: “May another take his place of leadership.”**

So Peter came forward with this proposal. **“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, BEGINNING FROM JOHN’S BAPTISM TO THE TIME WHEN JESUS WAS TAKEN UP FROM US.** The man to replace Judas needed to be someone who had been with Jesus from his baptism three years earlier to his Ascension just a few days earlier. But the key to this three-year-long acquaintance with Jesus was this: **“ONE OF THESE MUST BECOME A WITNESS WITH US OF HIS RESURRECTION.”** Of all the qualifications that this replacement apostle needed to have, the first was that **he had to be an eyewitness to Christ’s resurrection**—the very miraculous event on which all Christian faith hinges!

What criteria would you have chosen? If you were Peter, what would you have directed this first-century voters’ assembly to look for before casting votes? *“This man must have dynamic personality!” “This replacement must be friendly and loving.” “This man must be really smart and know how to preach a good sermon and teach a good lesson. He’s gotta be near the top of his Sem class.*

Don’t misunderstand. It is a good thing for ministers to have a likeable personality, to love people, and to understand what makes them tick. But that didn’t make the top of Peter’s list of apostolic requirements. We can’t forget the importance of Jesus’ gospel message for accomplishing the church’s mission! Our sinful flesh is quite good at convincing us that something other than the

message of Christ's resurrection is the way to get the job done. That's when we start to sinfully doubt the effectiveness of the message of Jesus' resurrection. The power is in the Word, the Gospel to move hearts and change lives – not the personality of the preacher.

God has provided this message for a reason. Today is the final Sunday of Easter, but that doesn't mean we pack Easter away until next [March 27, 2016](#). The beauty of the resurrection gospel is that **it is a real historical fact** that carries so much meaning and comfort with it.

Jesus' resurrection says that the Father has fully accepted Jesus' death on the cross to wipe away our sins—**yes, even our sins of doubt and our failures to trust in the power of his resurrection message.**

Jesus' resurrection says to you who believe that **heaven is opened** and a place is waiting for you forever.

Jesus' resurrection says to every soul filled with faith in Christ that **death has been swallowed** up in victory and now the living Lord gives you eternal life.

Jesus' resurrection guarantees you that **Jesus walks with you** every day here on earth until you walk with him in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus' resurrection assures you that **God chose His only Son to serve the world with the message** of His grace and mercy as the Redeemer of the world.

2

God not only provides the message, He also calls the messengers to serve.

Let's go back to our first-century voters' call meeting to replace Judas. Peter states the qualifications. Then comes the nominations. **"THEY PROPOSED TWO MEN: JOSEPH CALLED BARSABBAS (ALSO KNOWN AS JUSTUS) AND MATTHIAS."** We don't know much about these two candidates. What we can say is how God called them: **THEN THEY PRAYED, 'LORD, YOU KNOW EVERYONE'S HEART. SHOW US WHICH OF THESE TWO YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO TAKE OVER THIS APOSTOLIC MINISTRY, WHICH JUDAS LEFT TO GO WHERE HE BELONGS.' THEN THEY CAST LOTS, AND THE LOT FELL TO MATTHIAS; SO HE WAS ADDED TO THE ELEVEN APOSTLES.** With two equally valid choices before them, the apostles prayed to the Lord, asking that he guide the process. They used the Old Testament custom of casting lots. The process likely involved placing marked stones in a jar. Then shook the jar and the first stone to fall out would be the one selected. So when Matthias' stone came out first, he was called to be the apostle to replace Judas. This was not mere chance. This wasn't a popularity vote for your favorite singer on **"American Idol"**. This was a divine call from God himself for Matthias to serve.

While we don't use stones out of a jar to call a pastor or teacher, we do use the Holy Spirit to guide the process. That's why it's a **"divine call"**. If my knowledge serves me correctly, we may be the only church body that strictly uses that method of calling our messengers. We let the Spirit do the calling through the congregation.

Let's also remember how God called you to serve Him indirectly. As we head into summer, there are the teachers/helpers in Sunday JAM and the VBS teachers/helpers we need for the end of July. The musicians who play, the singers who sing, the directors who direct, the Board members who lead, the many, many volunteers who use your talents and strengths behind the scenes to perform 100's of tasks in this ministry of St. Peter – **you have answered God's call to serve.**

That is ultimately the job of messengers – to help take people back to Jesus' resurrection. When the pastor announces "I forgive you all your sins," he is announcing the results of Jesus' resurrection. When the pastor baptizes a baby at the font and says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," he is connecting that soul to Jesus' resurrection. When you hear, "This is the true body and blood of your Savior Jesus Christ," he is feeding you with a preview of the resurrection feast you'll enjoy after your Ascension to heaven 1 day.

You messengers likewise have **the call to be messengers of the same message of Jesus' resurrection.** In the Gospel for today, we heard an excerpt of Jesus' **"High Priestly prayer"** spoken on Thursday of Holy Week. In that prayer he acknowledged that he was soon going to leave this world. But after his resurrection, he promised his disciples, **"I will be with you always to the very end of the age."** One of the ways Jesus is with us always is through that life-changing message of Jesus' resurrection. God has ensured that his church will have the messengers. That's you and me – who are **CHOSEN BY GOD TO SERVE** to proclaim: **CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA! Amen**