

The Story of Judas' Replacement
 (or, "When YOU Die, Can YOU
 Be Replaced?")
 Acts 1:15-17, 21-26
 The Seventh Sunday of Easter
 May 24, 2009 – Memorial Day
 The Sacrament of Baptism
 Oakland Avenue PCUSA
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Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 (NRSV)

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said,
 16 "Friends the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus ---
 17 for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry."
 20 ["For it is written in the Book of Psalms---'Let another take his position of overseer.'"]
 21 "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,
 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us---one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection."
 23 So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias.
 24 Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen
 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."
 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

One of the things that ministers do is conduct funerals and memorial services.

Funerals have a way of making me think about at least three things:

- (1) one is the person who has died;
- (2) another is to think about my own death;
- (3) and a third is remembering other persons who have died in

previous days or months or years.

The Preacher, in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, wrote:

“For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die...”
[Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a; RSV]

Funerals have a way of making me think about at least three things:

- (1) I HAVE been thinking about the people whose deaths have made our congregation and community a sadder place.
- (2) I HAVE been thinking about my own death and what I want to do before I die, the things I want my children to know before I die, the love I want to share with my family and with you before I die.
- (3) I HAVE been thinking about the most recent deaths in our congregation and how much we are going to miss these members.

Mixed up in all of this for me during these thoughts has been the church.

This is not simply because I work for the church, which of course is a reason, but it is also because of my belief in God and what this says to me about the church.

I simply cannot imagine what it must be like to stand beside an open grave without the hope of the church and without the hand-holding of the church! And I do not want to ever have to imagine it, either!

I NEED YOU to remind me that there is more than the grave,
and therefore I do not have to be afraid.

I NEED YOU to stand beside me and hold my hand
and let me cry on your shoulder.

I NEED YOU to be the church FOR me and TO me and WITH me.

I NEED THE BODY OF CHRIST. And that means YOU.

The Book of Acts tells the story of the 11 disciples meeting in an Upper Room after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. At this particular meeting, the group decides that it should fill the vacancy in The Twelve created by the death of Judas Iscariot. And that is what happens.

There are at least two questions raised by this story about the filling of the vacancy on The Twelve. [1] One is a philosophical question and

[2] one is a practical question.

The philosophical question deals with **the idea of replacement**, and **the practical question** deals with **our election process in our denomination**.

[1] THE PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION

raised by the replacement of Judas Iscariot asks if one can really replace a husband or mother or grandfather or sister or son or friend. It is in dealing with that question that the Christian faith speaks eloquently to the world in terms of the importance of human life.

- (1) You simply cannot replace one human being with another human being.
- (2) Every human being is of inestimable worth in the eyes of God and in the teaching of Holy Scripture.
- (3) Christian theology says that human life is sacred!

THEREFORE:

- (1) Of course people who are killed in an earthquake in Italy are important.
- (2) Of course the young, person killed in the automobile wreck is important.
- (3) Of course individual Christians and the Church of Jesus Christ through our governing bodies should have something to say to the church and to the world on issues such as abortion and capital punishment and starvation in some places in the world.
- (4) Of course one cannot replace a husband or a mother or a grandfather or sister or son or friend!

Jesus said: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will. But even the hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”* (Matthew 10:29-31)

Of course one cannot replace husband or mother or grandfather or sister or son or friend. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY TEACHES US THAT!

There are at least two questions raised by this story in today’s passage about the filling of the vacancy on The Twelve. **The philosophical question deals with the idea of replacement, and**

[2] THE PRACTICAL QUESTION

deals with our election process in our own Presbyterian denomination. What do you think that Matthias replacing Judas Iscariot says to us Presbyterians and our form of church government?

Time prevents us from dealing fairly with Judas the betrayer other than to wonder whether or not history has handled dispassionately the memory of Judas.

Recent discovery of Gnostic writings such as The Gospel of Judas raise good questions for us as do the fictional novel, The DaVinci Code and the movie “*Angels and Demons*.” You and I need to remember that the church has always said that Gnostic teachings such as The Gospel of Judas is heresy or false teaching, and books such as The DaVinci Code and movies such as “*Angels and Demons*” are fiction; they are nothing more than a good story.

The early church teacher, **Origen**, suggested that when Judas realized what he had done, Judas rushed to commit suicide in order that he might meet Jesus in hell, the world of the dead, and there, with bared soul, implore his Lord’s forgiveness. [Barclay, William, The Master’s Men, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1959, p. 80]

It is interesting that in today’s story all of the 120 people gathered together were not considered in replacing Judas. Just as our own **2009 Congregational Officer Nominating Committee** is hard at work right now in placing the opportunity of serving as an Elder or Deacon before some of our members, just so the names of TWO men were put forth in the story in Acts.

When the names of Matthias and Joseph called Barsabbas were brought before the early church, did you catch what the early church did? We are told that everyone prayed! And that makes that prayer the first unison prayer that is recorded in the New Testament by which they asked the guidance of God in the election process.

The use of the “**lot**” was a normal experience for the apostles, for had not the land of Israel itself been divided by the casting of **lots** during the time of Joshua and the claiming of the land of Canaan? And had not the kings of the land been chosen by the casting of **lots**? Two of the lots used in the Old Testament were called the *urim* and the *thumin*; they were carried by the chief priest in a pocket located on the front of the vest which he wore.

The usual New Testament method of the casting of **lots** was to write the names on stones which were then placed inside a jar. The jar was shaken until one of the **lots** was shaken out of the jar, and that name was the one elected.

Soon after this experience in today’s passage, the early church abandoned the method of choosing its leaders by the casting of **lots**, but the church did NOT abandon the idea that the leaders of the church were chosen by Almighty God!

Whether the leaders of the church are elected by vote of the congregation,

or are appointed by a church court,

or are marked by a gift of the Holy Spirit,

it has always been understood that the leaders of the church are ultimately chosen by Almighty God. That is certainly true in our Presbyterian form of church government where Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church presently has a congregational committee, our **Pastor Nominating Committee**, which will be making a report in two weeks, and a **Congregational Officer Nominating Committee**, which will be making a report later in the summer.

I have one final thought.

You may have noticed that a sub-title of today's sermon is:

“When YOU Die, Can YOU Be Replaced?”

And the answer, of course, is: **NO, YOU CANNOT BE REPLACED!**

You are a unique individual, made and loved by God. You are YOU.

And you cannot be replaced, because God loves you THAT much!