

**“AND THEN THERE WERE TWELVE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Acts 1:15-26**

### **Introduction.**

At the conclusion of our worship this morning we will have our annual election for elders and deacons. As I said last Sunday evening at our prayer service, this is the most important decision we make each year. The future of every church depends on its leaders. This is why we had a special prayer service for this decision, that’s how much of a priority it is for us.

Clearly among the apostles it was a priority decision as well. It was the only business they conducted while praying together in the upper room. But praying wasn’t all they were doing. There is something else going on here, there is an elephant in the room.

### **Acts 1:15-20a, how to let go of the past in the Spirit.**

Peter shows real leadership addressing the elephant in the room, the hole in their fellowship left by the apostasy of Judas. Think about this situation for a moment. Judas was a part of the closest circle around Jesus. For three years they did everything together, ate and drank together, lived together, experienced everything together.

None of the disciples saw coming what happened only a few weeks before. Remember they all said, “Is it I, Lord?” This was a huge blow. Their emotions must still be raw, anger, bitterness, total unbelief, betrayal not just of Jesus but of all of them. They were foxhole buddies, comrades in arms. This was a crushing disappointment.

But rather than falling into the pit of depression or anger or bitterness, they turned to prayer and Scripture for perspective and guidance. Notice how Peter anchors their faith in Scripture. In the middle of our text Peter quotes from two Psalms, Psalm 69 and 109.

The first quote supports the first half of our text, the second quote supports the second half of our text. The first Scripture stands behind what he said about Judas, the second Scripture stands behind the selection of his replacement.

Listen to Peter’s very first words, Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago. Notice Peter’s affirmation that Scripture was not written by man but by the Holy Spirit, it is the Word of God. Peter strengthens his brothers with the bedrock, foundational truth that God is sovereign and the Scriptures are utterly trustworthy.

The betrayal of Judas didn't throw them off track, it didn't derail their theology or their faith. They weren't wringing their hands wondering how in the world could this happen. They weren't questioning how Judas fooled Jesus, how he slipped through security, wasn't found out in the background checks? Or even why would a sovereign and all-knowing God let this happen?

No, they have complete confidence in God and in the Word of God, Judas was part of God's plan and under God's sovereign control. If you build your faith and confidence on this, then no earthquake will undo you.

They see the sovereignty of God in the worst event that happened in history, the killing of the Son of God. This perspective enabled the disciples to lay aside any bitterness toward the betrayal of Judas.

Their perspective is meant to be an encouragement to us and to strengthen our faith in the face of terrible evil.

What do we do when a circle of friendship is broken? How do we handle the betrayal or rejection of a Christian friend or relative? I have experienced it and it is one of the most painful things there is. We expect more from those who are Christians and so we are hurt more when they hurt us.

How many of us are carrying the pain and hurt of past betrayals or failures in friendship, people who have caused us great harm or embarrassment or disappointment?

How many of us are still nursing grudges, strong dislike toward family or friends or church members? How long has an old animosity, some sore spot, some bitterness lingered?

Bitterness and grudges and resentment are serious impediments to our spiritual growth, they quench and grieve the Spirit and deny the cleansing power of forgiveness in our souls. It was essential preparation for the coming of the Spirit that the apostles deal with this issue.

Learning how to deal with and overcome the hurt of betrayal is an important part of the Christian life. Learning to keep short accounts and being able to let go in healthy ways is vital to our spiritual health and growth. How can we overcome these kinds of hurt and pain?

**First**, it helps to know we are not alone, we are in good company. Jesus, the disciples, and later Paul all experienced it in deep ways. We know from Paul's last letter that he experienced this kind of deep hurt right up until the end of his life.

Jesus knows and understands our pain, having suffered the same things. That is meant to be a comfort to our souls.

*Second*, they were able to keep a spiritual perspective from the Scriptures. They could see God in the midst of the worst suffering. Not only did God permit Judas to act as he did, God anticipated it, knew it ahead of time and used it for a good purpose. God rules and overrules.

That enabled them to leave aside bitterness, revenge, anger, hate, and look to the God of the universe to work all things for good. When we believe that, bitterness is unnecessary. We can have strength to forgive and move on confident in God's grace and goodness.

And notice none of those hurt by Judas closed themselves off from still seeking and having other close relationships. They stayed open and that means vulnerable to being hurt again. The alternative is worst, to so guard our hearts that we don't let anyone close.

When your world caves in and the worst happens, cling to this unshakable truth, the sovereign purposes of God are unchangeable, immovable, invincible, supreme.

The gates of hell will not prevail against His church or His people. If God is for us, who can be against us?

### **Acts 1:20b-26, how to move forward in the Spirit.**

Peter discerned from the teaching of Psalm 109 that Judas' place must be filled.

Jesus had laid a foundation of twelve stones for the nation of Israel and clearly, He had laid a foundation of twelve stones for His new kingdom, His church.

But Satan had taken one of the foundation stones, clearly the gates of hell had tried to bring down Jesus' work. It was necessary for him to be replaced. So, they follow three steps in the process, ***nomination, prayer and election.***

Notice the criteria Peter uses to ***nominate*** someone to be an apostle. They had to be men who had been with Jesus during this public ministry, from His baptism until His ascension and were witnesses to the resurrection.

The most important thing was being an eyewitness to the resurrection. The most important part of being a Christian is affirming your faith in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

**Romans 10:9** If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Our salvation depends on the resurrection. That's why there is no salvation in anyone else, no one else has risen from the dead.

Next is *prayer*. Notice the balance of the human and the divine in this process of moving forward in the Spirit.

There is human wisdom in deciding the qualifications for nomination, what is necessary for one to be a candidate. But after we have done what we know to do, there is still something more important to be done.

The nominating part was easy. These men may have been the only two that fit the criteria. But then came the hard part. Which one? How do you decide? They prayed for the wisdom of God.

We have tried to make prayer a vital part of our process. We paused for prayer in the council room before even making a list. We devoted last Sunday evening to prayer for the elections. We asked you to be in prayer all this week.

Why? Because God is the one who knows our hearts. He is the *heart-knower*. The Greek word is kardiagnostes, which combines two words, heart and knowledge. God is the great cardiologist. He knows our thoughts, motives, desires, intentions, all we think in secret. Nothing is hid from Him.

We should know our own hearts. We should examine them and know what is in them. We should know that our hearts are full of sin and evil intentions and thoughts. We should know that God is the one who makes our hearts new and clean and right. We should know that only the pure in heart can see God and that our desire should be for God to create pure hearts in us.

**James 4:8** Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

The final step is the *election*. Besides having been with Jesus during His public ministry and being a witness to the resurrection, there is one other requirement to be an apostle, they had to be directly commissioned by Jesus. But Jesus is gone. This is why they used lots.

The two names were written on small stones and then shaken in a container until one fell out. This is their way of showing reliance on divine guidance. They wanted Jesus to choose who was to be chosen. But notice they prayed first.

If they had just used lots with nothing else that would have been a wrong use of them. But they first set qualifications and choose men based on sound reason concerning doctrine and experience and their relationship with Jesus. Second, they prayed and sought wisdom and guidance from God.

This reminds us there is no such thing as chance or fate or luck. God rules and over rules in every circumstance. There is nothing random in the universe, nothing that is just coincidence. They weren't trusting luck or chance, they were trusting God, they were asking Him to show which one.

They used Scripture, sound reason, and prayer. And then they left the rest to God and trusted Him.

### **Implications and application.**

This speaks to us of how we should move forward in our lives and how we should seek to discern the will of God. We should rely on spiritual common sense, Scripture and prayer.

These are the kind of leaders we need, who rely on spiritual common sense, Scripture and prayer and they apply that to every situation and issue in our church. Spiritual leadership requires spiritual leaders, people whose hearts are right with God, who like David, are men after God's own heart. If you will lead well you must be submitted well to God and His Word. Don't follow a leader who isn't following Scripture.

And we need to be a church full of members that do that, who rely on spiritual common sense, Scripture and prayer.

Not Anderson Cooper or Sean Hannity, not Oprah or Dr. Phil, not Joel Osteen, not even Chip and Joanna.

Our families need to be families where the parents rely on spiritual common sense, Scripture and prayer.

Practice this at home. Before decisions pray. Before school tests, before driving tests, before important meetings, moves, changes, making vacation plans, in the midst of financial decisions, looking for a job. Let your kids hear you submitting to God, seeking His will.

Do we want God to control our lives and the direction of them and all our plans? Then pray.

Pray, pray, pray. God loves to glorify Himself with answers to prayer, give Him every opportunity to glorify Himself in your home and family life.

I remember praying with a dejected son who was facing his third attempt to pass his drivers road test. The first two attempts had been done with bravado and arrogance, the third one in humility, relying on the Lord and God answered.

Remember the story of our dear friend who died in January, Susan Dabney, at her daughter's swim meet yelling for her to wait. Not swim faster but to wait. Her daughter knew that what her mother was saying was Isaiah 40:31:

**Isaiah 40:31** They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Like Peter and the apostles in a time of crisis, wait on the Lord in prayer and search the Scriptures and you will have the wisdom of God and the power of God.

What God has clearly shown in Scripture we must obey. For what is not clearly shown we must pray for wisdom and the overruling guidance of the Holy Spirit, and then trust God as we submit and follow, in constant reliance on Him.

God puts us all in positions where we don't know what to do and we have to call on Him and wait on Him and grow and mature in our faith as we depend on Him. This is true in both small things and big things.

It doesn't matter how great or small, what matters is how we live our lives before God, acknowledging Him in all things, from our daily bread to the provision of a life partner or the health of a loved one.

The disciples even in this quiet waiting period were being tested and trained for the storms of life that were coming when they would be tried under the severest of persecution.

You have heard me say before, the one thing worse than waiting on the Lord is wishing you had.

**Psalm 27:14** Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!