

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2022 – FESTIVAL OF ST. MATTHEW, APOSTLE –
ACTS 1:15-26

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

“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. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection. So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, ‘Lord, You know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry...Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.’” Thus far our text.

While living our everyday lives, we are sometimes caught up in the thinking that we are living our lives on our own with no appreciable help from God. After all, we are told by the world around us that we have to make our own living, that nothing is going to be “handed to us on a silver platter”, and “there is no free lunch in this world.” Consequently, it is difficult for us to believe that Jesus would care about us so much that He would be willing to daily be active in our lives. However, our text from Acts says as much, with the promise that He will continue to guide and sustain His people and His church here on earth.

When the disciples had a vacancy in their number, due to the sin of the world expressed in the actions of Judas, the disciples knew that they had to fill this vacancy. After all, Jesus had already told them that there would be twelve disciples, and there was one missing! However, they also knew from what Jesus had told them that the new disciple had to meet the same qualifications that they had met – namely, to be present for Jesus’ entire ministry. Therefore, they chose two men who met the qualifications, and then prayed to God for His guidance in which one to pick. After all, Jesus had ascended into heaven by this time – they didn’t have His presence right by their side in human form. However, the promised Counselor, the Holy Spirit, was indeed with them, as Jesus had promised He would be. They relied on the Holy Spirit’s judgment, which superseded their own, and He gave them the power to pick the right man for the job.

While this may seem a little bit far-fetched to us, and rather impractical and time-consuming, this complete reliance upon God to make a decision, the same should be true in our lives today. We are promised that God will guide us into all truth, and that He is there to show us the proper decision to make in every aspect of our lives. He does care about us on a daily basis! We are given the Holy Scriptures by Him to show us what to do, and to tell us what is right and what is wrong. Throughout, the writers were guided by the Holy Spirit to write what God would have them record. As a result, what is written in the books of the Bible is the truth, and it is the will of God. If we follow what is written in these pages, we can be certain that we are following the will of God. We are also given the gift of understanding what is written on these pages of the Bible by the Holy Spirit working in our hearts for wisdom and insight. After all, the Word of God is living and active, and will do what He wants it to do. He wills that we understand His

commands and decrees, and that we know what He would have us to do. Therefore, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to explain the Holy Scriptures to us, and guide us into all truth.

However, sometimes the Scriptures don't contain the answers to all of life's questions. After all, they were not intended to be a question-and-answer book for us, with solutions to all of the problems that we will encounter in this life. However, God doesn't leave us "high and dry". We can take comfort from the fact that He has shown Himself to be with us throughout all time. When we look at His involvement in human history, He has never left us without guidance. He came and lived among us, suffered and died to remit our sins. When we feel that we are left on our own, we can draw strength from this action toward us that He did. It reminds us that this world is not the ultimate goal of human existence; rather, life with Him in heaven is. So, we cannot get too wrapped up in our looking for a "guide and compass" in this life; rather, we follow His plan of salvation through His suffering and death. He may allow setbacks in our lives, but only because of the greater good of trust in Him that can result. However, He can use the situations of this life to guide us into what He would have us do. This is why we need to pray that God would work in our hearts to quell the resistance to His work that is a part of our sinful hearts, and that the Holy Spirit would have free course to work His will in our lives.

In addition, sometimes we are tempted to think that some things in our lives are too small or unimportant to involve God in solving. After all, we are conditioned to only seek outside help in our lives if there is something that we completely cannot handle on our own. We don't want God to "be bothered" with our little trifles; we want to wait

until we have something that is truly “worthy” of His attention. However, we have the promises of God that He loves us and wants to be with us every day. He has shown that His love for us is without end and without limit by His words and actions. In accordance with this, He promises to be there to guide us and lead us. His love is so great that He gives us gifts beyond our comprehension. He shows us love beyond our ability to understand it. Throughout the Scriptures, God urges us to come to Him with our prayers, regardless of the magnitude of the problem. There is no prayer that is too big, and no prayer that is too small. In Matthew Chapter 6, He says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest....For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” In other words, His will is to strengthen our faith and our reliance on Him. This life may try our spirits, but God seeks to keep us steadfast in faith in Him.

Tying this into our narrative from Acts, Jesus wanted the disciples to know that there was nothing too small to ask Him to do for them, because of His love for them. He would guide them in choosing a suitable replacement for Judas, and determining which of the qualified candidates should be chosen for the job. They wouldn’t have to make the decision on their own! He was more than willing and eager to give them the rest that they needed, and by extension, they could depend on Him to answer their prayers for guidance. After all, if someone is trying to make a difficult decision, it can become quite a burden for them. Jesus made it clear that He is our guide into the truth, and is our salvation. He wanted to guide them, and lead them, so that they wouldn’t have to worry about making the proper decision.

Along with this guidance, He also urges us to do what He would have us to do, and to follow His will. He wanted the disciples in our text to be trained, and make sure

that their new recruit was also qualified. He wanted them to have been through the first seminary course of study, if you will, with Himself as the faculty. By ensuring this, He could make sure that the first pastors were able to teach the people of His church in the way that He intended for them to be instructed. We do the same thing today. In the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, our pastors complete a comprehensive seminary training, which is conducted under the guidelines of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, to ensure that they know the true doctrine of the church and are able to teach it. Jesus guided the disciples to have their new member be one who had been with Jesus since His baptism; in other words, for the entire course of study that Jesus conducted here on earth.

This same guidance of God was used by the fathers of the church when deciding which books should be included in the canon of Scripture. They wanted to make sure that any book that was included in the Bible was written either by one of the 12 apostles, or by one who studied under them. This would not only provide authenticity for the Bible once collected, but would also ensure that there was a traceable link between the writer and Jesus Himself. Once again, Jesus works through His Word to tell us what He would have us know. He wanted the disciples to be trained by Him so that they wouldn't be swayed by false doctrine. He spoke His Word to them, in the same way that we rely on the Scriptures today for training. He WANTS us to consult Him, and to come to Him in prayer with any questions that we might have.

The disciples were charged to find a replacement for Judas, after Judas killed himself for his involvement in betraying Jesus. They did so in an orderly fashion, in accordance with Jesus' instructions that the disciples be the ones that had been present

since the beginning of Jesus' ministry. This was to ensure that the men charged with teaching the people about Jesus knew what they were talking about, and were trained by the greatest professor of all, Jesus Himself. They were promised that they could approach God for guidance with this ever-important task; in fact, He was accessible to them for their every need. Therefore, they prayed to Him for help with this decision before any action was taken. Unlike the world that we live in and its suggestions that we have to solve our problems on our own, Jesus tells us that He is there to be our complete sufficiency and salvation. He will not leave us abandoned in our problems and dilemmas; rather, He tells us that He has overcome the problems of this world. He places things in a clearer light – the light of His atonement. He has given us the greatest gift that we could ever fathom (eternal life), and continually blesses us with the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. In short, He has done everything for our salvation, and leaves nothing for us to work out completely on our own. Thanks be to God for His involvement and guidance in the lives of the disciples, in our lives today, and the promise of doing the same in the future. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.