

2015_05_17 Resurrection 7
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Named and Numbered by God for Ministry

Acts 1:12-26

INI

Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, who has ascended on high and led captivity into captivity. Amen

Acts 1:12–26

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

¹⁵ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, ¹⁶ "Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; ¹⁷ for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."

¹⁸ (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

²⁰ "For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

'Let his dwelling place be desolate,
And let no one live in it;

and,

'Let another take his office.'

²¹ "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

²³ And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take part in this ministry and apostleship

from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”²⁶ And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

This Word of the Lord was spoken for you.

Named and Numbered by God for Ministry

1. Forgiven in Jesus no matter the sin
2. Called through the Church no matter the numbers
3. Sharing in ministry no matter the calling

In 2012 it was estimated that the population of the world had topped 7 billion. What do you suppose that looked like to God? Just a sea of faces blended together in a mix of different skin colors? Is this world nothing more to God than a child’s finger painting – He smears it this way and that way until he feels satisfied?

When you look at devastation left by the earthquake in Nepal, it might seem so. Over 8000 dead in the April quake. And now even more in Wednesday’s second earthquake. In the worst hit areas they say that only 5% of houses are still standing. Is God just smearing things this way and that, with no account for individuals?

Today we take up this question: does God know us as individuals or are we simply a smear of different colors to him?

1. He forgives in Jesus no matter the sin

Judas was just one person out of a sea of people in the first century world. But he was also one of twelve that were given exclusive access to Jesus; who walked with him, talked with him. This was a great privilege; a great calling that Judas used to his own advantage.

Now if you had the option of selecting the twelve apostles who would accompany Jesus and form the foundation for the New Testament Church, would you choose Judas? Jesus did. And Jesus knew all there was to know about Judas. He knew that Judas would dip his hand in the treasury box; he knew that Judas would dip his bread in the bowl of betrayal; he knew that Judas would dip his soul into the devil’s snare. But he still chose him.

It was the morning after the arrest and Jewish trial of Jesus that Judas realized what he had done. He had condemned an innocent man. He had betrayed his own Lord and

Teacher. He had dipped his soul into the devil's snare. And it spiraled downward from there.

He went to the priests, trying to make it right, trying to calm his troubled conscience, trying to give back the bribe. But there was no forgiveness to be found there. He didn't know where to turn. There was nothing he could do to correct this. And he spiraled downward, deeper and deeper into the devil's snare, until it dragged him head first into his own despair and death. And the field was called Akel Dama – the field of blood.

Peter says to the apostles, "Let his dwelling place be desolate and let no one live in it." Peter quotes Psalm 69 where we hear the words of King David. In the psalm David is praying against those persecute those whom God has struck and wounded. He is speaking of those who make things worse for God's people. They are like the priest, who respond to Judas, "what is it to us?" Rather than helping those who are burdened by sin and grief, rather than bringing them God's forgiveness and mercy, they shame them, and pile on more guilt. As David writes, they "add iniquity to iniquity." Judas went to hell, not because God hadn't forgiven him, or because his sin wasn't atoned for, but because he didn't believe it to be true. He did not know where to turn. This is a place to be left desolate, empty. It is no place for you or God. It is the devil's snare to make you think there can be forgiveness for your sin. Leave it behind and flee from the devil's Akel Dama.

Remember, Jesus still choose Judas. Even though he knew about the money box, the bread, the kiss – he still forgave Judas and offered that grace freely by going to the cross. He could have avoided it, but he went to the cross, even for Judas, even for the worse of sins. If God could take the greatest evil – the death of his own Son – and turn it into the greatest good – the resurrection and the forgiveness of sins – then surely God has forgiven your every sin and will work out every evil for his good purpose.

God doesn't see a sea of sinners blended together in a mix of different indistinguishable sins – he sees you, marked by his finger, touched with the blood of Jesus; he marks Matthias by name, he marks you by name. Even those 8000 who died in the earthquake, he knows each of them, each of their sins and struggles, he knew them all on the cross. As long as Jesus sits at the right hand of God, there is forgiveness; he constant pleads before God for you – no matter the sin – last week; last year; or something that haunts you in your past – He forgives you.

2. He calls through the Church no matter the numbers

As the people of Nepal sift through the rubble, trying to find what has been lost, trying to rebuild what has been destroyed, it seems overwhelming. What can such a small number, with such little financing do against so much damage. But of course, out of that rubble, comes the stories of rescue – a five month old baby rescued after being trapped beneath an apartment in rubble for over a day; a 101 year old man rescued after being trapped beneath the rubble of his home for over a week. Each an individual; each found and rescued by individuals. Whatever the numbers, each person matters.

And to the apostles, the numbers might have seemed overwhelming too. What were 11 of them against a world that was shaken by sin? Would one more really matter? What was so important about Matthias?

Well, God does not just see a sea of faces; he names individuals for ministry. He specifically chooses each and every person that will carry out his work through the Church. And from these 12, God will bring eye witness testimony to the most important fact of our salvation – Christ has risen. From these 12 God will give testament to Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and teachings. From these 12 God will build a foundation for a gospel movement that will one day exceed 2 billion. So Paul writes, "You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19).

So yes, Matthias matters. And every office in the church matters. Now that Christ has ascended into heaven, this is how he will be represented. As Paul writes in Ephesians, he ascended and gave gifts to men. He gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelist and some he gave to be pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4). No matter the numbers.

It wasn't too long ago that I had the call to Lynwood, Washington. Now if that decision was based strictly on numbers, I wouldn't be here anymore. But God doesn't see a mix of faces blended together in a finger painting. He doesn't move the church by just smearing things around haphazardly. No he calls individuals, and he does it through individuals, and he does it with his finger directly on what he wants.

And so I didn't look over a smear of numbers and faces. I saw faces – each having their own place in God's kingdom, each having their own struggles in God's kingdom. And it doesn't matter the numbers, because God sees and saves individuals. God sees you.

God sees you gathered 4 years ago and passing the vote to put in a request for a graduate. And how many voters were there? Probably not even 12. And you probably didn't even know who I was other than a young sem student with a wife and kids. But God knew and God was there. God saw you and the course of events that would come

into your life over the next four years, and he chose me. In many ways it is just a roll of the die from our perspective – but in prayer, this becomes the calling of God where he names Matthias; where he names your pastor - and now this calling and ministry is something we are joined to; together in Christ we share in this ministry.

3. He gives you a share in ministry no matter the calling

As we said before, when you look at the needs in Nepal, it can be overwhelming. It is easy to start thinking, what can I do to help? What difference can I make? I am just one person. Its not really my place to get involved. I've got enough going on already. I'll leave it to the government to handle. Is that ever the way you feel about ministry? What difference can I make? I've got enough going on already. I'll leave it to the pastor to handle.

But God doesn't see only a sea of apostles and pastors involved in ministry. He sees individuals – like you – who have a share in this ministry no matter the calling. He sees individuals like Justus.

Now just because Matthias was chosen and not Justus doesn't mean Justus has no share in this ministry. Was he a farmer – then he went to growing his vegetables. Was he a fisherman – then he went to catching fish. Was he a father – then he went to teaching and caring for his children. No matter the calling, he was still a Christian – he was still one of the 120 disciples mentioned, each with a name, each numbered for ministry.

The church would soon face the overwhelming challenges of ministering to all those in need. The apostles just couldn't do it all. So they appointed Deacons. In Acts chapter 6 we see the apostles appointing other men to help with the daily distribution of bread. Each called by name. Each numbered for a share in this ministry, no matter the calling.

God doesn't just smear a mix of colors around until he is satisfied – he chooses individuals and paints them each in a specific shade of color to complete his design. And so he reaches into the church and there he paints a picture. He paints a picture where, yes, one member is standing in the pulpit preaching. But he is not alone. Another member is sitting on the lawn mower, putting in a couple hours caring for these 5 acres he has given us. And another member is vacuuming the hallway and cleaning the bathroom. And another member is placing an offering into the offering plate – supporting the pastor and the fellowship of the CLC. And another member is praying. In fact all the members are praying with one accord – praying for our brethren in Nepal; praying for our congregation. God doesn't just smear a mix of colors together.

So what happened to Justus? Well, he's right here and there; sitting next to you. He is you. There is very little that the pastor can actually do on his own. So God paints you into the picture. Each of you have a share in this ministry no matter the calling.

From our perspective, Nepal looks like a mess. Has God slipped up? Has he haphazardly smeared his fingers all over this picture? From down here that is what it may look like, but from above is another picture. From above, God looks out over the wreckage in Nepal, and sees people, individuals, each marked by his finger. He sees our brothers in the HCLCN and their names and numbers. He sees Raju and his family who miraculously are among the 5% of houses left standing. And he puts them to work; they open their house to the wounded, the homeless. He sees pastors and Christians in the HCLCN with a chance to testify to the hope that is in them. He even sees you and me, and give us opportunity to help – to supply financial support; to lend our prayers. Yes, God has a purpose and a calling for each of us. He is not smearing things around, but reaching out with a finger dipped in the blood of Christ and choosing individuals – individuals whom he forgives no matter the sin; whom he calls no matter the number; whom he gives a share in ministry no matter the calling – for he has named and numbered you for His ministry.