

## “The Toss of the Dice”

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

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*Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 - In those days Peter stood among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, “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 – for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”*

*So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning with 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.” So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.*

If you have ever been a part of a team be it sports, business or something else, you can testify to the fact that it is difficult to lose one of your members. For some teams, there is a synergy that happens when everyone comes together and contributes all their energy and gifts to produce this amazing thing. If the team has been together for a long time, there is this history of stories and a deep relationship that bonds them together. When you lose a member, you lose momentum and many times the other members have to pitch-in and work double time to produce the same result. When you decide to replace the lost member, there is usually a lot of time and effort put into who you select to replace that person. You may or may not want the person to have similar gifts, skills and character. A team and the people who make up the team are very important when it comes to getting the task that is set before them accomplished.

The disciples are faced with this dilemma. They have lost Judas and the team of Jesus’ twelve disciples is down to eleven. Jesus has ascended into heaven leaving them with the task of building the church by witnessing to others about his resurrection. This is going to be a huge undertaking! They are looking for a replacement. They have found 2 who are up for consideration. I find it interesting that they have been followers of Jesus from the time he was baptized until his ascension. I didn’t know that any of the disciples were present to see John baptize Jesus in the Jordan River. But here it says both of the men were there. It is also interesting that we are told both of the men’s names. In many of the stories of healing and miracles, we are not given the character’s names. But in Acts, it says that Matthias and a man with 3 names – Joseph-Barsabbas-Justus are the candidates for the job.

When I was a recruiter for FedEx, there was a long application process. I would administer a Basic Skills test to all the courier and customer service applicants. There was a 12-page application for all candidates to fill-out when they applied. To process their application, I would run a criminal background check on them and call their references. After all that checked out, I would then interview them for the position. This was just for handlers, couriers and customer service agents.

I am just floored when it comes to the process that the disciples use today in Acts when they go to select their candidate. Now, I am not surprised by the fact that they pray asking God to show them which one has the heart for this ministry to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. But what blows me away is that they cast lots to see who gets chosen. They simply roll some dice. What? Seriously!

Matthias’ number comes up and he is picked to replace Judas. There is not any confetti that falls from the ceiling or Ryan Seacrest from American Idol present. There were no ballots to count. They didn’t even have to refer to the Book of Order from the PC(USA). The disciples simply prayed to God and had the faith that God’s will would be shown to them. It was that simple!

So, how would it feel to be Matthias? He had made it into the circle of the “Twelve Disciples”. If you have ever accepted a call in the church to be an elder, deacon or trustee, I would think you know what it feels like. I heard it yesterday at my Kairos training with all the team members who have been called to serve in this ministry. Do you wonder if you can serve to the best of your

ability? Do I have the time and energy to give it my all? How will I be able to do all that God has asked me to do? Yet, God knows all of our hearts. God knows our gifts and what we are faced with in our lives. It would be clear what God wanted us to do. When called or asked to serve in a certain way, we know what God is telling us to do. It is as clear as the numbers rolled on the dice.

How would it feel to be Joseph - Barsabbas - Justus? Have you ever been one of the last two chosen in gym class? That was me with no athletic ability looking down at my shoes hoping I would hear my name called. Then to not be picked and have to go to the other team was difficult. What happens to Joseph - Barsabbas - Justus after he lost the coin toss? Did he get his feelings hurt after he was passed up? Did he get upset and leave town?

Years ago, I had applied to be the Director of the Mother's Day Out/Preschool at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church. I had worked there while my children were young for about 6 years. But at the time when I applied for this position, I had left and was working at the Bureau of Jewish Education. I was still a member at St. Andrew. I thought I had a good chance in getting chosen but I was not given the position. It really hurt not being selected. One of the people who had interviewed me was a good friend. I let this decision affect our friendship. My husband and I remained active members at the church but this left a huge sore spot. A couple years later, I ended up going to work at FedEx which gave me a lot more career opportunities. This was clearly better for me. Why couldn't I see God's will in all of this?

Adapting to God's will even if it is as simple as a roll of a dice, Joseph - Barsabbas - Justus had to look beyond his own agenda. He really had the more difficult job of waiting to see what God had in store for his future. There was probably a lot of prayer and discernment involved. We really don't know what happens to this man. We do know that he had followed Jesus and that he had witnessed incredible things just like Matthias had.

I would think that he followed Jesus closely and that he knew the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. This prayer that we say every Sunday, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Joseph - Barsabbas - Justus knew that this meant that God comes first. Following God's will is seeking what God wants for our lives. Now, God's will is not about getting Alzheimer's, cancer or being the victim of a natural disaster when bad things happen to good people. Following God's will is seeking what comes next and seeking God's guidance when it comes to making major decisions in your life.

Do you struggle with accepting God's will? I think for me the waiting to see what God's will is for me is the most difficult. The discernment process can drive me nuts! We have to be patient as we wait on God! I sometimes wished it could be as easy as a flip of a coin or a roll of a dice. And then when the answer finally arrives, I just don't always like the way God answers me. How God can be so confused when I know what is best for me?

But for Joseph - Barsabbas - Justus, I think he was hanging out with the disciples trying to figure out what comes next and the day of Pentecost arrived. As the wind and fire of the Spirit hit, he figured out another way to share the witness of Christ, accepted the will of God and used his faith to impact others faith journey. It certainly took more than the team of 12 disciples to share the Gospel.

As I was working on my sermon, I was reflecting on the faithful people in my life who had an impact on my faith journey. The person who came to my mind was Glen Bell. Years ago, Glen was my pastor and he is still a good friend. Glen has been thrown some curve balls but he has pretty much stuck by his faith and followed God's will. He was the one who would push me; and he believed in me when I was going through Commissioned Lay Pastor training. He told me not to quit when it got hard. When I first came to John Knox, Glen was the one I went to for advice. He has been a great help to me in my ministry.

Who are the people who made an impact on your faith journey? Were they more like Matthias or Joseph - Barsabbas - Justus? Thanks be to God for those people who are willing to hear the call and faithfully live out God's will. Amen.