

AMC Sermon- Fulfilling the Office of First Witness

Scripture: Acts 1:15-26

Sunday, June 6, 2021

In our first couple steps into the book of Acts we looked at Christ's work in preparing His disciples for the birth of the church. In the first sermon we looked at key aspects of Christ's last 40 days with his disciples. In the second sermon we looked at the next 10 days when the disciples came together in unity to prayerfully prepare for the Pentecost. In the third sermon today, I am going to dwell on one last thing that needed to be taken care of before the church was ready to be born, the replacement of Judas Iscariot. We will look at why Peter thought Judas needed to be replaced, how they went about it and what this replacement tells us about the role of witnesses to Christ Jesus.

First we will start with the "why replace" question. When you look at our passage you find that Apostle Peter is beginning to take a lot of initiative even before the big day of Pentecost. During those 10 days when the extended group of disciples, the group of 120 were gathered in prayer, somehow the subject of Judas Iscariot came up. We don't know if someone else brought it up or Peter himself was prompted to bring it up. But Peter verbalizes the issue and sees scripture verses that are directly speaking to what Judas did. And he comes to the conclusion that Judas' actions were a fulfillment of scripture. He concludes that Judas led the Romans to Jesus just as scripture had prophesied the details of the manner of Jesus' death. He may have thought of Zech 11:12-13 which says¹² ***And I said to them, "If you like, give me my wages, whatever I am worth; but only if you want to." So they counted out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.***

¹³ ***And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter^[a]"—this magnificent sum at which they valued me! So I took the thirty coins and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the Lord.***

He may even have thought of Ps 41:9 which says ***“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me”***

But in Acts Peter specifically quotes these two Psalms, Ps 69:25 which says ***“Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it”*** and Ps 109:8 which says, ***“let someone else take his place”***. And he looks at these two verses and says, if these verses relate to Judas then it is also telling us what we need to do now. He tells those gathered that they must make sure that someone else takes the place of Judas.

But he also lays down the criterion for the replacement. And the criterion he articulates is that they must have been with the core disciples and have witnessed the entire ministry of Jesus from baptism to ascension. Which makes a lot of sense. ...

So when you look at the big picture here this is what you see. Somewhere in those 10 days between Christ’s ascension and the Pentecost, Peter felt that to start the ministry that Jesus had given them, it was not just enough to go ahead with whoever was there. He felt that Jesus had chosen 12 to get things started and when you look at scriptures it was clearly indicating that Judas’ had to be replaced. And that is exactly what they understood to do.

Now let me address a thought that some of you may be thinking. Well, if Jesus had to die by crucifixion and for that to happen someone in his inner circle had to betray him then maybe the plan was to have 11 apostles and 1 betrayer. So why replace Judas? Why not forget about Judas and move on with the ministry? Well but think about this. Up until this point, most readers will only be aware of the 12 men and a few woman who would have been close enough to Jesus to even be in a position to betray Jesus with credibility. But when you consider the process used to replace Judas you realize that there very many people who had been with Jesus and observed him the entire time and perhaps there were many others who were with Jesus all the time who were in a position to betray Jesus. In other words nobody can say that it had to be Judas. Even within the 12

it could have been any of the 12 and beyond the 12 there were others who could have played the role and Jesus' mission would still have been fulfilled. Jesus did not chose a person to betray him. Jesus chose people to be a witness to Him. Unfortunately because one of those chosen to be the very first set of witnesses turned from witness to betrayer. It was because one of the 12 failed to fulfill the duties of his office that scriptures then say he had to be replaced because the office of witness is higher than the individual who sits in it. If the individual does not fulfill the role of his office, scripture calls for the individual to be replaced.

Ok, let's look at how they chose the 12th man. Essentially there are three steps to the process. Step 1 was to define the criterion for the candidate. Peter lays out these requirements in verse 21 and 22. ***So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—²² from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection.***

So the requirements to fulfill the office of witness is clear enough so the group use that criterion and pick two men, Mattias and Barsabas, who also went by Justus. Then they prayed to God to pick between the two.

As was done many times in the Bible when they wanted God to chose, they cast lots. This makes a lot of sense because if the process is random you know that no individual has the power to influence the outcome. So you can be sure that the outcome is something that God desired. So they cast lots and the lot fell on Mattias. So Mattias became the 12th man who would take up the role of first generation male witness to Jesus.

Let me just take a moment to talk about this idea of being a generational witness. The Bible is always talking about God's relationship with people in generational terms. In the

Old Testament you will see the refrain, “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” over and over again.

The New Testament begins of course with exceptionally long genealogies of Jesus. But in Paul’s letters he specifically calls out a spiritual genealogy of his co-worker Timothy saying the first to be a witness in his line was his grandmother Lois, who witnessed to her daughter Eunice and she witnessed to her son Timothy. Every individual who has some faith in the world should be able to think back to who it was that passed their faith to them.

That is because there is a generational sequence to faith. And every individuals faith even if you cannot name the people and trace it yourself, the fact is that there is a link between every individual with faith today all the way back to the very first set of eye witnesses, the 12+ people who hold the office of Apostle or first witnesses of Jesus Christ. I say 12+ because there were all the woman and we don’t know how many exactly. There was also apostle Paul who was also generation 1 because he received his faith directly from Jesus like the others. So we don’t know what the exact number was but God knows that there was a precise number of first generation witnesses.

And these first gen witnesses shared their faith to a bunch of people and so they became the second generation witnesses. Now we have no idea how many there were. But there were an exact God ordained number of second generation witnesses, not one more and not one less. And so on to the third and forth and fifth generation and so on.

We may loose track of the number of generations and the number of witnesses in each generation but remember, there is an exact number of generations and an exact number of individuals chosen by God for each generation because that is how God operates considering everything we know about God’s sovreignty in the Bible. Not one hair falls from our head without God knowing it and not one disciple becomes a disciple without God personally being involved in drawing them to Himself.

In other words every disciple holds a very special office starting with the office of the first 12+ disciples and every generation that follows.

What does this mean for you and me? I will tell you what it means. It means that if you hold the office of disciple of Jesus Christ, you are one of a precise number of people who hold the office of witness to Jesus Christ. There are also a precise number of people that God has pre-ordained that we pass our faith on to. We may not know what that number is, but we do know it is not zero or a even a negative number. That means people loosing their faith because of us, God forbid 😊 But there is a positive number. It could be 1, or 100, or even a 1000. Whatever it is, the idea is that if we do everything that God calls us to do then we will manage to pass our faith on to that perfect and preordained number.

But there is another side to it. From the story of Judas and many other passages in the Bible I will also say this. If you and I do not do what God meant for us to do and pass our faith on to the people we were meant to pass our faith on to, our task will be given to someone else and someone else will do our job. God is fully capable of raising witnesses from the stones on the payment of our church and making them take our jobs. Because God's work will never be stopped because we don't do what we have been called to do.

My pray is that each one of us takes our place fully into the office God has given us, the office of witness to Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour of the world and sent by our heavenly Father. I pray that we become more aware of our office and our calling. I pray that our calling begins to grow on us, and we desire to be Christ's witness amore and more. And I pray that one day, we will have successfully passed our faith to every last person predestined to hear it from us making us fully ready then to cross the finish line and pass on to the reward that awaits us in the arms of Jesus. Let us pray.