

Sermon for The Seventh Sunday of Easter

Date: May 24, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

First Reading: Acts 1:12–26

Epistle Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

Gospel Reading: John 17:1-11

Sermon Text: Acts 1:12–26

Sermon Title: Living In Between

Introit: Psalm 100; Antiphon: Psalm 101:1

Traditional:

LSB 587 – I Know My Faith is Founded
LSB 482 – This Joyful Eastertide
LSB 493 – A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing
LSB 644 – The Church's One Foundation
LSB 781 – We Give Thee but Thine Own
LSB 617 – O Lord, We Praise Thee
LSB 650 – Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling



Praise:

Holy is the Lord
Father Make Us One
Indescribable
Give Thanks
Lord Reign in Me
Grace Alone

Liturgy:

Creative Worship with excerpts from D.S. IV



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Text: Acts 1:12–26

Then [the apostles] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." (Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

“May his camp become desolate,
and let there be no one to dwell in it’;

and

“Let another take his office.’

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show 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 numbered with the eleven apostles.

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our risen and ascended Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The reading we heard today, from the book of Acts, tells us what the Church did during time between Jesus' ascension into heaven (which we celebrated last week) and the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (which we will celebrate next week). Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until they



had been clothed with power from on high.¹ They were waiting. Ten days they waited. It probably seemed longer as each hour and day dragged by always wondering if the Temple authority would find them. Waiting isn't easy, especially when you're doing nothing but worrying.

The thing is, "waiting" is the way of things with God. We want what we want when we want it, but God gives in His own good time. God made Abraham wait 25 years for his promised son Isaac. God made the people of Israel wait 400 years in Egypt before He brought them out. God waited thousands of years before fulfilling the promise He made in Eden to send a Savior to bruise the serpent's head.² The important thing is to understand those are not wasted years. God uses that time working and preparing His people for the works that He will do. Work and preparation isn't always easy.

Now in comparison to all that, ten days doesn't sound like too much. but what was the Church doing those ten days? The Bible tells us they were praying. Don't you wonder what were they praying? I would guess they were praying the psalms, the prayer-book of the Bible. It is there they found what happened Judas³ and they learn that another should take his place.⁴

What a shock it must have been for them when Judas turned against Jesus, and against them too. Judas who had been their close friend, and who had learned with them, taught with them, baptized with them and with whom they shared everything. They thought they knew him. Yet here in the psalms they learn that while they were shocked, this was no surprise to God. Here it had been written a thousand years earlier. Jesus had indeed gone just as it was written of Him.



1 Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4
2 Genesis 3:15
3 Psalm 69:25
4 Psalms 109:8

They had undoubtedly heard these words before, (the Psalms were their prayer-book, and also their hymn book for weekly worship) but now in Jesus they hear them in a new light. They were encouraged by them. They also learn that another should take Judas' place. The work must go on. God would not give up on them. Though Judas betrayed,⁵ Peter denied,⁶ Thomas doubted,⁷ James and John grasped at glory,⁸ and they *all* struggled to believe,⁹ God was going to use them. The Office of the Holy Public Ministry, though filled with men who are sinful and flawed, would go on. So they turn to God in prayer to fill the office.

It's not just the Church, at that time, in that upper room, that lived in an "in-between" time, so does the Church now. We live between Jesus' first coming and His second coming. Just like with the Church back then, it isn't always an easy time. There is waiting. There are trials and struggles of faith. There are shocks, doubts and fears. We are betrayed and we are betrayers. We should remember Peter's wise words read today:



Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.¹⁰

That someone was them, and that someone is you.

You don't, and you won't, see the red-suit with a pointy tail and pitchfork. He is much more devious than that. He bears his fangs at you through others, through people you thought you could trust and respect. Like when those you thought you knew and could trust shock, hurt and betray you. He bears his fangs through you, at others when you devour someone's reputation with gossip, harbor fits of rage at people because things aren't going your way, or tell lies about them. Seeing all this sin, hurt and betrayal in the world, in the Church, and in others can give the appearance that perhaps God has left you, forgotten about you, and turned His back on you. Whispering such thoughts the devil is seeking to devour your faith and, like Judas, tempt you to seek another way. Any way other than The Way, Jesus.¹¹

So what's a Church to do? Well the example of the apostles is a good one. In this in-between time, we stay in the Word of God and in prayer. It is the Word of God that will sustain us in our faith, even when faced with the assailing attacks of

5 Luke 22:48

6 Luke 22:60

7 John 20:25

8 Mark 10:37

9 Acts 1:6

10 1 Peter 5:8

11 John 14:6

Lucifer, whether they come from within, from without. It is the Word of God that keeps us, encourages us, strengthens us, and teaches us that though we are often shocked, surprised and dismayed, our Lord never is. He is working for us, and for our salvation, even though we may, as Peter says, traverse through fiery trials.¹²

Today, in the Word of God, we heard something else, we heard Jesus praying for us. Jesus, who Himself was betrayed, who knew something of fiery trials, who knew how hard this in-between time would be, prays for those who have been given to Him by the Father. Those who were His disciples then, and are His disciples now.



The hour had come for Jesus to go to the cross and be, as He says, glorified there. We don't think of the cross as glorious because we have been blinded by the false glories of this world, glories that don't last and aren't really glorious. Riches come and go, power fades and fails, popularity and pleasure can vanish, but the glory of the cross is everlasting. It is the glory of God's everlasting love for sinners like us, that would cause Him to come for us and die for us. In fact, Jesus' time on the cross was His "in-between" time - when the holy and perfect One hung in-between two criminals. The One who was both true God and true man hung suspended in-between God and man, in-between heaven and earth, as the sacrifice for sin to reconcile us to our Father.

It is precisely because of Jesus' in-between time on the cross, because of His death and resurrection, that we are kept and protected in our in-between time. That is what Jesus prays. He prays that the fruits of His cross be to shine in you. He prays that the Father would keep you in the Baptismal name that has been washed over you and into you. He prays that you may be one with Him, and with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. He prays that you may be made holy in the Word which forgives your sin and declares you a child of the heavenly Father. These are the very blessings you have received in Christ and from the glory of His cross.

How else can you explain how the Church is still here? The Church which is the object of the world's contempt and the devil's attacks; the Church

by schism rent asunder
and heresies distressed.¹³

¹² 1 Peter 4:12

¹³ LSB #644 – The Church's One Foundation, v. 3

The church which is the victim of our own failures. It cannot be because of us, but because of Jesus, that there is a Church and will always be a Church, where the glory of His cross is proclaimed, the wonder of His forgiveness is given, His Spirit is bestowed, and His Holy Supper feeds and strengthens us. For though He is now ascended, Jesus hasn't stopped working for you, and is still praying for you, as the Holy Spirit takes all our weak and faltering prayers and voices them to the Father.¹⁴ In Jesus, your prayers are heard.

It doesn't always seem like it. Life in this in-between time can be rough and seldom seems to get easier, but here again the example of the apostles can help us. They can remind us that the Word of God and prayer aren't really what we do - they are what God does us. Through the Word the Spirit strengthens us, gives to us, encourages, and comforts us. When the trials, struggles, hurts and betrayals of this in-between time drive us back to the Word of God and prayer, then we are blessed. In the Word of God we find Jesus right where He said He can be found.

So as we live in this in-between time and await Jesus' second coming, we who have been clothed with the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism, to us, Jesus says, don't devour one another, devour Me. By eating His Body and drinking His Blood, as we will do momentarily, we receive His power from on high brought down here to us, and are there we strengthened to go out from this place into our calling spreading His Word and His Good News. Not to make a name for ourselves, but bearing His name.



That may mean suffering or challenges for a time, but be not afraid. The One in you is greater than the one in the world.¹⁵ He who has gone to prepare a place for you¹⁶ will keep you until He comes again. Then, finally, all the Word of God will be fulfilled:

*and we like saints before us
will see Him face to face¹⁷*

Let us hold on to that faith.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

14 Romans 8:26

15 1 John 4:4

16 John 14:2-3

17 LSB #644 – The Church's One Foundation, v. 5



**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**