

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
*"Easter VII: Acts 1:12-26"*  
Pastor Stephen Reynolds

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Given that it is Memorial Day Weekend, where our nation takes an extra day to remember those who have lost their lives in service to our country, I'd like to start with a pastime that many of us associate with this weekend and that is often associated with America-Baseball. Specifically, spring training in 1995. You see, spring training in 1995 for Major League teams was drastically different. The previous season had been disrupted by a labor dispute between the player's union and team owners, so that even the 1994 World Series was canceled. The players and owners were unable to resolve that dispute over the winter, and so when it came time for spring training in 1995, the players refused to show up. The owners, determined to not lose money by not having a season, decided to employ what were known as replacement players- those who weren't part of the players union and were willing to play for relative peanuts when compared to what normal players would make.

However, as the owners quickly found out, when you take out the top 800 baseball players in the world, the product quality suffers when you try and plug in whoever is willing. The LA times recounts that, "The Florida Marlins, in a desperate attempt to find a shortstop, tried a truck driver, a carpenter, a high school economics teacher, a junior varsity coach, a rookie league manager and two softball players at the position." These replacement players weren't big leaguers, and that became clear very quickly with their farcical play on the field.

Our reading from Acts this morning tells how a replacement player of sorts was selected to be numbered among the Apostles. They've got a vacancy of sorts due to Judas' suicide, and Peter, knowing his Old Testament scriptures, and so they set out to find a replacement. Most people run right to the end of the text, where the Apostles cast lots between Justus and Mathias, and the lot falls on Mathias. It's sort of weird, and what makes it all the weirder is that, after explaining this whole process about installing Mathias as one of the apostles, we never hear from him or about him ever again. There are some later traditions, but Mathias is never mentioned again in the scriptures. Mathias' career is similar to those replacement players-a brief mention and a fade into obscurity.

But what often gets passed over in the text is what happens in the middle, the actual process itself-the criteria the apostles apply to those they would consider to fill the spot. They were looking for someone who had been with them from Jesus's baptism until the Ascension. The whole process is bathed in prayer, and eventually the Lord leads them to Mathias to be a witness to the resurrection of Jesus. This wasn't a pennies on the dollar high school economics teacher turned big leaguer scenario. **This was a process rooted in the scriptures, well thought out by the church and bathed in prayer** that led to God raising up another witness to the resurrection of Jesus and what He was doing. God continues to provide for his church by raising up men and women through the church to be witnesses to the resurrection, **especially in very difficult times.**

This time of pandemic has been difficult for many for all sorts of reasons. Some are worried about their own health, or exposing an aging parent or relative to the virus. Others are worried about their relatives, serving on the front lines of the healthcare sector. Still others are worried about the

economy and the financial devastation. Many are just annoyed that some of life's simple pleasures have been curtailed.

On a spiritual level, what this pandemic has done is reveal just how rooted we actually are in the scriptures and God's promises. Do you remember the parable of the sower, where one set of seeds falls in good soil, but then the plant is eventually choked out because of the thorns that grow around it and because it hasn't taken root? Tough times don't so much strengthen or weaken faith as reveal how rooted one already is in God's promises. Peter knew the Old Testament Scriptures-He was rooted there, despite his many shortcomings, and was able to boldly step forward and fill the office of Apostle. This pandemic and all of the crosses of life reveal how rooted we are in God's word and His promises, or not.

A life rooted in the scriptures and God's promises leads to a life of discipleship that is well thought out, not guided by the spirit of this age. Peter and the other apostles did not choose the most popular or richest or whoever they felt was due the position. Criteria was established and a process was followed. Only after this were lots cast. Tough times have a way of making us impulsive, seeking only to preserve, protect and think of ourselves. That's the antithesis of our call. As the "Safer at Home" order has now been lifted, many have exercised their freedom to its furthest limits. St. Paul would remind us that while "all things are permissible, all things are not beneficial.' As people called to be rooted in the word and in God's promises, our lives are meant to reflect that. We live not only for ourselves, but for our neighbors. We recognize that we are not our own-we were bought with a price, and freedom is to be exercised in service to our neighbor.

Finally, a life that is rooted in the scriptures and God's promises and is well thought out according to them leads to a life of discipleship that is bathed in

prayer. God has used this pandemic to awaken us from spiritual slumber, and this is good! Perhaps you've re-initiated the conversation with your heavenly father that has been dormant for a while. Perhaps the angst and worries have become too much and have driven you to your knees, where the only thing you have left is prayer. Praise God! The worries of this world, especially with our 24 hour news cycle that constantly reminds us of just how bad things are, are not something we are meant to carry alone. A life bathed in prayer allow us to lift these burdens up to our heavenly Father in conversation and prayer.

In all of these things, we can see that God is working through the difficult times to reveal our need to be rooted in the scriptures and His promises, life a life of discipleship that is well thought out and bathed in prayer. God uses difficult circumstances to both reveal the necessity of these things for our spiritual lives and also to remind us that he continues to provide for His church during these difficult times.

In the HBO series "Band of Brothers", which follows soldiers of Easy Company in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division as they prepare for and then enter World War II, there's a scene that takes place after D-Day, where Easy company had dropped into enemy territory and established a beachhead. The fighting had been fierce, and Easy Company had sustained heavy losses. Eventually, the Easy Company is pulled off the line, and they are provided with replacement troops for those who were KIA. The veterans, of course, didn't like this very much-They had been through brutal fighting, seen great loss and now these baby faced replacements were going to be fighting next to them. Yet, in difficult circumstances, God worked through even these replacement soldiers to accomplish His purpose is very, very difficult circumstances-the Battle of Bastogne and all of the subsequent fighting. This is one example of God at work through his left hand and the vocation of

soldier. The veterans of Normandy are soon very grateful for God's provision of these replacement soldiers.

In all of these situations, God graciously provides for His people because he continues to work through difficult circumstances. God raised up Mathias through the church to see that his kingdom work would be done. God allowed this pandemic to come upon us so that he might both reveal our own spiritual depravity and also strengthen our relationship with him. God calls us to be rooted in the scriptures and His promises, to live a well thought out life of discipleship and to be bathing our entire life in prayer, whether in good times or bad.

Thanks be to God for his gracious provision in Christ in all times! Amen!