

## “The Twelve”

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“How many have had their name drawn out of a hat and won something?”

Quite exciting isn’t it? ‘specially if you know what the prize is.



But drawing the short straw – that usually means there’s a job to be done and no one wants to do it.

I recognise that raffles are an effective means of raising money, but I don’t usually take tickets. However, once in Wanaka I did put my name in the hat. The local Skydive company had asked us to carry their brochures in our busses and offered a free skydive in exchange. Well at a staff meeting we thought the fairest thing was to do the hat thing. I wasn’t particularly interested in the prize but really just wanted to fill the numbers as there were only about five or six of us on the staff. Well, I won. It was quite a scary prospect to jump out of a plane at 12,000ft and I wasn’t all that sure I wanted to do it, but it turned out to be an amazing experience.

And today’s reading from Acts brought it to mind, as it tells us that in order to replace Judas they “cast lots” – sounds like throwing dice but there’s no detail as to quite how they did it. Maybe names in a hat? Drawing straws? Tossing a coin?

The occasion was when the disciples were still in Jerusalem after Jesus had ascended, waiting in the place where they were staying until they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The eleven leaders are named, and we are told they remained constantly in prayer. It was less than six weeks since the crucifixion, and I’m sure their delight in Jesus’ return was somewhat tempered by the threat posed by the Jewish authorities. So, they waited, and they prayed.

Of course, that had been a strong feature of Jesus teaching and leadership. He went to some trouble to find quiet places to communion with God, he regularly worshipped and taught in the synagogues. He was faithful to the practices of Judaism and prayer was very much part of that – so much so that Jesus deplored the ostentatious show of the Pharisees and encouraged privacy for personal prayer. As a practical example he gave his disciples a model prayer which we have already used ourselves this morning.



And surely, live in their memories would be that last Passover meal where Jesus prayed specifically for them. As John recalls, Jesus asked the Father for their protection, as they faced the dangers of the mission ahead without him, and that they would know the same unity that he had with his heavenly

Father. He also prayed for us – those who believe in him because of their witness. And he prayed that we may be one with one another, and one with God, so that the world would believe that Jesus had been sent by God

And there were many more than the eleven – whom Luke calls apostles.

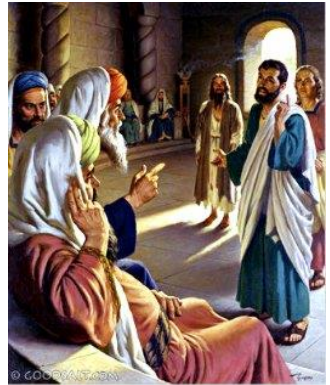
When Peter decides to take some action the group then numbered 120.



He refers to scripture to explain the gap in their number and quotes a psalm of David to justify finding someone to take the position left by Judas and so restore their number to twelve. But why twelve you might ask?

Well presumably it was because Jesus had originally chosen twelve to be the primary carriers of the Good News. There were certainly others who travelled with them and listened to Jesus teach, but these twelve were his chosen ones – those who would take over once he was gone.

But surely, eleven would have been enough? However, there's plenty of evidence to support the view that Jesus saw himself as Israel restored, the new Israel, and so the twelve had a significant role to play as representing the twelve tribes of Israel. In this it is important to remember that at this stage and presumably in the mind of Jesus himself there was no intention for his followers to break away and start a new faith community.



Certainly, there was a growing understanding that the message was not just to the Jews but was to include gentiles as well, but that was seen as part of a revitalised and renewed Judaism. Even after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, the leadership of the 'believers' as they called themselves, remained in Jerusalem probably right up until the Emperor Hadrian cleared all Jews out of Jerusalem in AD 130. By then the Gentile churches were well established and certainly Christianity was heartily rejected by faithful Jews, and Paul along with others took on the task of spreading the faith, so that the significance of the Twelve was largely lost. Not only that but the criteria for appointment to the Twelve became increasingly more difficult to fulfil with the passing of time.

The two chosen as possible replacements for Judas fulfilled the key requirement of having travelled with Jesus and been taught by him as Peter put it "beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken from us". Even James the brother of Jesus who later became the leader of the Jerusalem Christians, didn't qualify. The Twelve were to be "Witnesses of the Resurrection". What that exactly means we don't really know, but maybe Luke gives us a clue in the examples he chose to include in his story.

The stoning of Stephen perhaps, but then he wasn't one of the Twelve. He was appointed as one of the seven men chosen to ensure the food resources were fairly shared.

Or maybe Philip who responded to the unlikely prompting of the Holy

Spirit and had that chance meeting with the Ethiopian who was then baptised, and took the good news back to his home and to his Queen.

Although the Book of Act doesn't say much about Thomas, other traditions tell us that he travelled to India and planted the Ma Thoma church in India. As you may have guessed, 'Ma Thoma' just means 'Thomas' in the Syriac language they spoke. It was founded in Ad 52 which was about the same time Luke accompanied Paul to Jerusalem at the end of Paul's third missionary expedition.

Actually, it was on the return journey, that Paul and Luke spent some time at the home of Philip and his prophetic daughters, in Caesarea, so Luke had the opportunity to hear a first-hand account of Philip's adventures.

As well as being a doctor, Luke was an historian who did his research



well, and on that journey had opportunity to talk face to face with many who feature in his two-volume account of the spread of this new faith, which he wrote only a few years later.

In reading his account I find it intriguing that all though the early part of Acts he reports that they did this, or they did that, up until the occasion in Troas where Paul had the dream of a man from Macedonia calling for his help. From that point, in Acts 16, verse 11, Luke starts writing 'we put out to sea; we travelled to Philippi; we stayed there several days. I suspect, as a doctor, he was used to keeping a daily record of what was going on in his life, of patients he had seen, of treatments he had used. Maybe he's one of the first Christian journalists.

But he doesn't tell us much about Joseph and Matthias, these two put forward as candidates in the election of someone to make up the Twelve official 'witnesses to the Resurrection' - the ones specially charged as guardians of the Gospel, the good news about God's vindication of the one he had sent to redeem the world.

How did they feel about it? Was Matthias happy to be the chosen one? Did Joseph feel disappointment or relief that the lot had not fallen on him?

Anyone nominated for a position of consequence will know the range of feelings following the voting.

And how were they chosen, I wonder? What other personal attributes led to their nomination?

The Presbyterian church is just now in the process of selecting people for nomination to be the Moderator elect - the one who at the Assembly in October will be elected to be Moderator of the General Assembly in 2020. It's a long, careful, and we hope, prayerful process involving parish councils and presbyteries. And we look for the Spirit's leading in the process.

It hasn't been our practice however, to cast lots, or draw straws, or toss a coin, but this story in Acts became quite important in the election of the Council of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, at the first annual Chapter meeting I attended in Indianapolis four years ago.

The Order had become quite dissatisfied with the usual way of electing people to particular positions in the Order and had previously decided they would try a process of electing a council of five and let them decide how to organise the business of running the order.

They also wanted to do it in a way that would allow more time to listen for the leading of the Spirit. So they set aside a whole day for the process. Every professed member of the order was eligible unless they withdrew their name from the list. From morning tea to lunchtime people were to consider the list, write down and submit the names of the five people they believed, after due prayer (but no discussion), to be suitable for the task.





After Lunch the collated shorter list was posted, and people were given another two hours to repeat the process and without consultation, but with deep prayer, select two men, two women, and one other person of either gender. Later in the afternoon the scrutineers returned. They reported that the

process had thrown up the names of two men, two women, and two others with equal votes.

How do you want to resolve this” they asked?

We didn’t know the names, but there was plenty of discussion, and prayer, in considering what to do.

“Let the two decide? Go with six? Or toss a coin as they did in Acts to replace Judas?”

That was no easy decision as the pros and cons of each option were worked through. Eventually a common mind was reached, and the scrutineers were sent back - to toss a coin! Shortly thereafter they returned to say, “We tossed a coin, but it landed on its edge!”

However, the next toss was successful, and they gave us the names of the new council.

We don’t actually know who the lot fell on. But I would have to say that it was a result that had the full

support of all participants, and the attention to prayerful listening for the leading of the Spirit was not only deeply consistent with Jesus’ prayer for his disciples, but as a new-comer I could see how the process really strengthened the unity of spirit among the members.



“May they be one” Jesus prayed. “Love one another” he said, and sent the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us in living his life, here, at the ends of the earth.