

## Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas - Acts 1: 12-17;20-26

<sup>12</sup>Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk<sup>[c]</sup> from the city. <sup>13</sup>When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup>They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

<sup>15</sup>In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) <sup>16</sup>and said, "Brothers and sisters,<sup>[d]</sup> the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup>He was one of our number and shared in our ministry."

<sup>20</sup>"For," said Peter, "it is written in the Book of Psalms:

"May his place be deserted;  
let there be no one to dwell in it,<sup>[e]</sup>

and,

"May another take his place of leadership.'<sup>[f]</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

<sup>23</sup>So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." <sup>26</sup>Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

## “OUR HELPER IN CHOOSING” – May 24, 2020

Acts 1:21-26

God, in his wisdom, has given us the ability to make choices. Life is full of choices and we enjoy our right to choose and our freedom to choose.

For example, there are many churches to choose from. A pastor was shaking hands with people after worship. A couple greeted him and said, "We listened carefully to every word you said." The pastor thanked them and said he looked forward to seeing them next week. "Oh, we won't be here next week," the couple responded. "We're going to another church next week to get a second opinion." People are free to attend the church of their choice, or no church at all.

So we have been given the freedom to choose. Now sometimes you might say about some decision or action, "I had no choice." Well, you probably did have a choice but one choice was so obviously better that it made the alternative essentially impossible. For example, if you are selling a particular item and buyer A offers you a higher price than Buyer B, then the choice of A is pretty obvious. But not all choices are so clear. Some are very difficult. I think of the decisions facing our political leaders in these days of COVID-19. The choices they make have real and serious consequences for peoples' health, for the economy and for our whole way of life, for weeks and months, maybe even years to come. Let's hope and pray their choices are good ones.

So sometimes it's obvious what choice we should make. But sometimes the right choice is not always clear. Now we can receive help in making choices from trusted advisors, including our own family members. We can also receive help from God. For God is our helper in choosing.

Acts 1 tells us about a choice the early church had to make. After Jesus' ascension to heaven, the 11 apostles returned to Jerusalem. One day, Peter stood among them and said, "You know what happened to Judas, who betrayed Jesus...so now it is necessary for us to choose a 12<sup>th</sup> apostle. This person we choose must have been with us throughout Jesus' ministry. This person must be a witness with us of his resurrection." So the group nominated two men, Joseph called Barabbas, and Matthias. Then they prayed, "Lord ...show us which of these you have chosen for this position." Those early Christians were right to pray and seek God's choice. They recognized that God is our helper in choosing. And his help comes to us in various ways.

*First, God helps us to choose, but doesn't always make his choice clear to us.*

The apostles prayed for God to show them his choice. But God didn't do so in an obvious way. So the disciples cast lots. They wrote each man's name on a stone, put the stones in a container, shook the container, then turned it upside down. The first stone to come out had the name of Matthias on it. So he was added to the 11 apostles.

Now that's not much different than flipping a coin. It seems like a strange way for God to reveal his choice. But perhaps in this case God considered either man to be suitable. The 11 apostles had done their due diligence. And that was a key step, bringing forth two fully qualified men, either of whom could fill the position. Actually we hear nothing more of Matthias in the New Testament. When we lived in Halifax, I used to pass by a church called "St. Matthias." I always had to think about who Matthias was. Actually, God's choice for the real 12th apostle lay in the future. It would be the man named Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul. So Matthias or Joseph? Perhaps either one was fine with God.

Some choices are like that. Some are equally good, or occasionally equally bad. It's really a coin flip. And God may help us to choose, by allowing us to use our common sense and thinking processes. Prayer helps, and so too, does consulting Scripture, and using the wisdom we all bring to the table. God helps us to choose, but doesn't always make his choice clear to us. That's because either choice may be fine. And we can't wait forever to choose or for God to reveal his choice to us. We simply move forward and make the best choice we can, using our God-given wisdom and intelligence. And doing that that honours God.

*Secondly, God helps us to choose and sometimes he clearly makes his choice known to us.*

In 1 Samuel 16, God sent Samuel to Jesse's house to anoint a new King for Israel. The oldest son Eliab, came forth. The prophet thought he was God's anointed one. But God said to Samuel, "No, not him." Six more sons of Jesse passed by and each time God told Samuel, "Not my choice." Finally, Jesse's eighth son and the youngest, David, was brought in from the fields. The Lord said to Samuel, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."

Well, God does help us to choose, and sometimes makes his choice very clear to us. There are examples in Scripture of God helping people to choose a different way, when their hearts and minds were set in another direction. Acts tells us that Paul and his companions planned to preach in Bythinia, but the Scripture says, "the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." Then God gave them a vision that they were to go to Macedonia instead and preach the good news there.

Certainly we have guidance in Scripture as to God's choice in big matters of faith and Christian living. For example, Scripture speaks to the kind of person we are to look for a

marriage partner, a person of faith and good character, without directly naming that person for us, obviously.

But God can also make his specific choices clear to us. He puts a compelling spirit within us which says, "This and not that."

Let me be personal. About three months before I accepted the call to be minister at Streetsville United, I had received a call from another church to be their minister. The interview had gone well. We had checked out the community and the church. Everything seemed fine. The congregation had been recommended to me by a friend in ministry, and he had recommended me to the congregation. On Monday I planned to phone and accept the call. I was at peace with the decision when I went to bed on Sunday evening. But Monday morning I woke up and everything had changed drastically. God had worked in me overnight. I knew I had to say "No," which I did after a day of struggle. I didn't know it at the time but God's choice for me was to be the minister here at Streetsville. And when the call finally came I knew it was God's choice since he had so clearly blocked the other choice. Now I've been here for twenty years. When a choice really matters, God makes his choice clear to us.

*Thirdly, God helps us to choose, but works for good even through our poor choices.*

Even when we make the wrong choice, or choices that are not God's choice, all is not lost, not by any means. Well, there is one choice that we could make that means eternal loss. We'll talk about that one as we close. But most choices, even poor ones are redeemable. God does not stop working in our lives and weaves even our poor choices into his good plan.

I apologize for speaking so much about myself, but I hope this will help you think about how God has worked through your choices. After I graduated from high school, I choose the wrong university and the wrong course of study. Now the university is an excellent school, but it wasn't right for me. And the course of study was of interest to me in high school, but it was not really where my strengths are. I really floundered and it was only by the grace of God that I was able to return for a second year, and adjusted my courses significantly. Things got better from then on.

But despite my poor initial choice, God was at work. You see, when I was a young boy God had planted some seeds in me about becoming a minister, seeds which lay dormant for a long time. But through a church I attended near the campus, and its very interesting minister; through some people I met, and courses I took, those seeds started to germinate. God was working to fulfill his plan despite my initial faulty choice. Some years after graduation those seeds had germinated to the point where I could say "Yes" when God's clear call to ministry finally came. Perhaps all that would not have happened if I had gone

to another university. God works through even our less than inspired choices to fulfill his good plan for our lives. How wise and gracious he is. We can really trust our Heavenly Father.

Finally, this. *Even though he won't force us to do so, God helps us to choose Christ as Saviour.*

We all have faith in something or someone, but only faith in Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen and coming again, is saving faith. The theme of the book of Acts is summed up in chapter 4, verse 12, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we may be saved." And from John - "Whoever has the Son of God has life, whoever does not have the Son does not have life." Pretty clear choice, isn't it? Life or death; eternal life or eternal perishing.

New life and eternal life comes to you as you choose Christ and put your faith in Him. Through Word and Spirit God helps us to choose Christ though he won't force that choice upon us. God honours the freedom he's given us. But he continually works through all our life experiences to make us realize our need for the Saviour. God's Holy Spirit keeps striving with you throughout your life, helping you to say "Yes," to Christ, not only once, which is very important, but continually throughout our lives. And I must say that when you do choose to put your faith in Christ, it almost seems like a gift you've been given rather than a choice you've made. Certainly that's how it feels to me. In any event, God's invitation to us and his desire for each of us is really quite simple. And it's a choice he helps us to make. Perhaps he's helping someone to make this choice right now. Choose Christ. Choose faith. Choose life.