

**The Acts of
Little-Known Disciples:
Matthias**

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Acts 1:15-26

We refer to it as the book of Acts, but its formal title is “The Acts of the Apostles.” The story starts out listing the eleven apostles left after Jesus ascension.

Peter and then Paul are the apostles who take top billing in this epic volume of the birth of the Christian church.

But there are other disciples, some named and some unnamed, who populate this book; and today and next Sunday we will hear the stories about the acts of two of these little-known disciples.

Read - Acts 1:15-26

Matthias – the disciple to replace Judas... This is the first church decision made without Jesus being present.

All we know about him is in these few verses at the beginning of the Acts of Apostles.

According to what Peter said, Matthias must have been part of the company from the beginning, and Peter says this means from the time Jesus was baptized by John in the river Jordan.

So, Matthias was in the crowd in the synagogue in Nazareth when Jesus began his public ministry by reading from the prophet Isaiah and was energized by this man who claimed to fulfill those liberating words of God...

Matthias began walking with them along the shores of the Sea of Galilee; he heard Jesus preach and talk about things like the great commandment; he listened to the parables,

and discussed with other followers just what Jesus meant by these stories; he saw Jesus healing the sick, touching the unclean.

Matthias was probably one of the seventy sent out by Jesus. Luke writes about them in his gospel as Jesus says, “the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few...” and then they go into their world with Jesus’ message and mission.

Matthias had been part of the company from the beginning all the way up the trail to Calvary; even to the time Jesus was taken up, ascended into heaven.

Now, in the upper room, Matthias was in the company of those 120 laborers gathered for the harvest field of the kingdom of God; and his name was chosen as the one to replace Judas, to restore the apostles to the proper number.

Now we don’t know what happened to Matthias after Pentecost. How he turned out as an apostle, what kind of apostle he was, we have no idea.

But what we know means a lot for us today.

On one hand is what Matthias learned from Jesus, the content of his gospel message, what Jesus talked about; and on the other hand, the reality of the gospel in the person of Jesus, the one he walked with and then saw ascending into heaven.

So, what does it mean for us today?

Like Matthias, on one hand, we have Jesus’ ethical principle of inclusive love, to throw your arms wide open and welcome, embrace all kinds of people.

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Of course, quite explicitly, Jesus' message was about love. He spoke about love for one another, he spoke about love for neighbors, and he spoke about love for enemies - those who were strangers, those who weren't like you, those who might "have it in" for you. He said that we were to love them whoever they were.

And it's not easy.

Our ability to love is colored by jealousy and scarred by envy and limited by our selfishness.

We pull back our love at the slightest provocation, and we withhold our love because we've been hurt before.

Sometimes it's easier to curse than to bless, to shout others down than to sit down with them, easier to be loud than to listen.

The inclusive message of the love of God in Jesus Christ challenges us, and this may well discomfort and trouble us.

For some it might be in the area of sexuality, for others it may be in the area of money and power, of race or ethnicity, any area of life where we wrestle with who we think God wants us to be, what it means to obey the calling of Jesus Christ.

Because following Jesus Christ costs something.

Like Matthias, on the other hand there is this exclusive view about his person: that to follow him we must deny ourselves and take up the cross.

Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples and Matthias must have heard it, too: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Sometimes we hear people describe their failing health, the loss of their job, their broken relationships as “the cross” that they have to bear.

While I don’t want to minimize their suffering, I don’t think that’s what Jesus meant by “carrying one’s cross.” In Jesus’ day, the cross was a political instrument executing the oppressive power of the Roman Empire.

The cross was the death penalty that the Roman Emperor used to deter people from challenging his power and authority.

When Jesus, referring to himself, announced that the Kingdom of God was near, that declaration was a direct challenge and threat not just to the religious authorities but also to the occupying Roman Empire.

To carry one’s cross, to follow Jesus in the way of discipleship means to live in such a way that declares “Jesus is Lord,” not the Roman Emperor, not the American President, not Wall Street, not our job, our politics, our pleasures.

We cannot grasp Christ merely with our heads or our hearts. We come to understand him through a total, all-embracing practice of living; and that means discipleship.

Jesus is Lord, not our need for comfort, security, worldly success, or power. And when we follow Jesus instead of these others, I guarantee they will fight back.

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That's what we know about Matthias. He had heard the inclusive call to love one another, and he had heard the exclusive call to take up the cross of Christ, and he had seen in the person what that call meant for his life.

Matthias, the disciple who replaced Judas, reveals the inescapable grace of God with the high call and demand of God within our lives.

The same challenge facing Matthias faces us. Just as he was waiting in that room, waiting because Jesus said he would send his Spirit, so the world is waiting, waiting for us, waiting for Jesus' church, waiting for that word of love, the gospel message, and waiting for that word of life, the gospel message in a real person.

Like Matthias we offer ourselves to God as servants in the name of Jesus Christ, to shoulder people's burdens on his behalf, to be his witnesses, taking his love to men and women; the love which meets all needs.

Like Matthias, we, too, are called to replace Judas and enter the story of the Acts of the Apostles.

Not the Systematic Theology of the Apostles, not the Book of Order of the Apostles, not the Policy Manual of the Apostles, not the "This is how we've always done it" Apostles.

No, simply "The Acts of the Apostles": spirit born, spirit driven, spirit led, going, doing, talking, showing, teaching, healing, helping, praying, sharing.

The world is waiting, a troubled and perplexed world, so let us go, like Matthias, to carry on our shoulder the cross and in our hearts the joy of service until Christ's work is complete and all people are set free by the love of God.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

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