

Numbered with the Eleven

Easter 7

Pastor Josh Frazee

Acts 1:12-26

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

There are many times and places to stand up and be counted, or to be numbered among a group. You have probably been in at least one.

This is Memorial Day weekend. Do any of you have members of your family who died in combat or serving in the armed forces over the years? Perhaps you've been asked to stand up and be counted for that at one point or another. Or maybe you've been asked to stand up and be counted as one who has a loved one currently serving in one branch of the armed forces or another. In these cases, the purpose for standing up is recognition.

Another way in which you might be numbered with a group is in preparing to do a project. Many of you have probably done this kind of thing in high school. The teacher starts at one section of the classroom and has you count off "One," "Two," "Three," repeating at a certain interval to make a set number of groups. Yesterday, my aunts, uncles, and friends who had been invited to a meet-and-greet party for Anna in Beardstown had to do this. They were counted off in threes so that they could work with relatives that they may not have known before in order to accomplish a goal. Their goal yesterday was to make a wedding dress on one of their teammates out of toilet paper. Then each group would be judged by Anna and me as to which had the best toilet paper wedding dress.

This morning in our First Reading, one of the disciples who had been going along with the disciples was going to be chosen. This disciple would be numbered with the eleven apostles to make the number twelve once again after the loss of Judas, who had gone his own way. One of our focuses will be on why Judas had to be replaced, making the number twelve once again.

Verse 1

“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.”

Judas was an unfortunate human being—and that's putting it extremely lightly. He had been numbered with the apostles, and was allotted to share with them in their ministry about Jesus. But as Jesus said, it would have been better for him had he never been born. He delivered Jesus into the hands of the authorities who were going to put him to death. When he learned that they were going to put Jesus to death, he tried to make amends by returning the thirty pieces which he had been paid, but the authorities refused to take it back. Utterly lost in despair, Judas fell headlong, bursting open. Because he lost all hope in Jesus, he went to his own place, namely, hell.

We know what happened to Judas because these things had been written concerning him even before he turned Jesus over to the authorities. So what does this mean for us? In a word, it means that it is not once saved, always saved. Judas had been numbered with the apostles and shared in their ministry. But he had gone his own way, despaired, and didn't turn to Jesus for forgiveness.

This is a sad message which we've been hearing over and over from God's Word. The Israelites who wandered forty years in the wilderness. They had been God's people, but they had turned from Him to do their own thing, and God let them die in their sin. The man who had taken spoils from Canaan and tried to hide them

in his tent—God knew what he had done. But the man did not repent but instead died in his sin. Esau gave up his birthright and did not receive it back no matter how many tears he cried.**

We don't know when judgment may come. But we do know from the Scriptures that when it comes, we will either be found remaining in faith in God through our Lord Jesus, or we will have turned our own way. If we are found in Christ, we will enter the new heavens and new earth with Him to life everlasting. If we are not found in Him—if you are not found in Him—you will go to hell forever. No amount of tears will change His mind—not even if you cry, “Lord, lord”! The worst thing we could ever possible hear is Jesus saying “I never knew you.”

God does not need you. He wants you to be saved, but as with Judas, another can easily take your place.

Verse 2

“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.”

God does not need you to accomplish His purposes. But He does desire that you believe and will be saved. That's the whole reason that Peter can say that there was a time that Jesus went in and out among them.

Beginning with the baptism of John all the way to His ascension, Jesus' entire life was devoted to bringing sinners to repentance and faith. John the Baptist came preaching repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand; and Jesus' very presence there among them was the kingdom of God at hand for them.

Jesus' life was devoted to the preaching of Law and Gospel—that no human had or was living a perfect life in the sight of God, or ever would. No one in the Old Testament, not the rich young man who claimed to have lived the commandments since his youth and Jesus told him to give up his riches, not the Pharisees or Sadducees, and not even His own chosen disciples, reproving them time and time again. And Jesus preached the Gospel, that everyone who came to Him would never thirst again, never die eternally, and that He was going to prepare a place for them in heaven.

Today, Jesus has ascended back to heaven and no longer goes in and out among us. While He has returned to the right hand of God, His Word remains among us. From hearing that Word as handed down from the apostles who had walked with Jesus, you and I have been made witnesses.

Verse 3

“And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”

Peter encouraged that there be twelve among them by citing David's psalm that another should take the office of the one who would betray the Messiah. As Church of Sweden author Bo Giertz put it: “There had to be twelve apostles. There was a message in that number. Israel had twelve tribes, and the apostles were the new Israel, God's people, who gathered around the Messiah (“To Live with Christ: Daily Devotions by Bo Giertz,” Wood, R., and Erickson, B, translators, p. 355).” The Word of Christ would be spread by twelve, just as it had been sent by twelve tribes in the Old Testament.

This does not discount the work of the other disciples of Christ—either the men or the women who would take that Word from the apostles to the nations. Matthias was numbered with the eleven to make twelve, but his message did not change. Likewise the message of the other disciples did not change. It is this same message—the same Word of Christ Jesus—which has been passed down to us by the Church, the new Israel.

Today, you and I have been numbered with the eleven apostles, just like Matthias. That does not make the number more than twelve—it means that their message has become our message. All people have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God; and Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, took on human flesh, went in and out among us, died for their sins and ours, and He ascended into heaven to prepare a place for all who would believe on His Word.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.