

Stepping Into The Gap

Acts 1:15-26 NIV

Beginning where we left the disciples last week in Acts chapter one, after they watched Jesus disappear in the sky and talked to some angels, Luke writes that they returned to Jerusalem.

In verse 13 of Acts 1, we read, “When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying.” Luke then tells Theophilus who all was present: the eleven hand picked disciples plus the women who supported Jesus along with his mother and brothers.

In verse 14, he writes that, “They all joined together constantly in prayer...”

In the last two verses of Luke’s Gospel, we read about another place that the disciples spent some time during the ten day wait between Jesus ascension into Heaven and the arrival of what God had promised He would send: ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (Luke 24:52-53)

So between this upper room and the temple, a prayer and praise meeting was taking place. And in verse 15, we see that they had some company—a group of about a hundred and twenty—so about a hundred others had joined the eleven, the women, and Jesus’ mother and brothers.

But something else besides prayer and praise had the attention of the eleven:

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers^[e] (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— ¹⁷ he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.”

Here is a side note about Judas for Theophilus:

¹⁸ (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. ¹⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

You can read more in detail about Judas’ suicide in Matthew 27. Judas rather dramatically returned the money that the priests paid him to betray Jesus and the priests took this ‘blood money’ and bought the potter’s field, fulfilling prophesy.

Continuing with verse 20:

²⁰ “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,’^[d]

and,

“‘May another take his place of leadership.’^[e]

²¹ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² 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.”

²³ So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:15-26)

The Psalms that Peter refers to are 69:25 and 109:8 respectively.

During my time in some commentaries and reading some sermons on this section of scripture, some have questioned Peter’s presumptuous authority and the casting of lots used to fill the vacancy. Some even argue that the twelfth spot belonged to Paul.

As far as the method: the casting of lots; it is written, **“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.”** (Proverbs 16:33)

As far as what Peter and the disciples did; one of their number- one who had shared in their ministry- when Jesus sent out the Twelve and the Seventy in pairs, I have to believe that Judas was in the number. He saw the miracles; maybe even did some. And now, with his tragic death in the not so distant past, and during this time of joy and praise, they have to take the time to replace him. Is this bitter/sweet to those who shared in this ministry?

Also, I want to point out and make you aware that during this time of praise and prayer; during a time of celebration and anticipation of what God was going to do, and before, I suppose, the church was officially launched, they had a board meetin’.

This is like the ‘good news/bad news’ cartoon where a man in a hospital bed has a visitor. The visitor says, “I have good news and bad news. The good news is that our club members voted to wish you a speedy recovery. The bad news is that the vote was five to four.”

A church board meeting before there was a church! Good news/bad news...

But the real message, I believe, is not just what Peter and the disciples did by replacing Judas, but with the two disciples,

Joseph and Matthias, willing to step up to fill the gap.

Allow me to begin with an illustration from back home.

In the southern Ohio area, there is a ministry called Gap. A minister that I became acquainted with through Kyohwva Evangelistic Association, Kevin Yeager, is the director of GAP Ministries. GAP Ministries serves to strengthen the church by encouraging men to serve as preachers at congregations in need. Kevin saw a need and stepped into the gap to fill the gap, you could say. On the Gap website, the scripture that is used to represent the ministry is **Ezekiel 22:30**;

³⁰ **“I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”**

During the time my family and I spent at Kentucky Christian College, we became aware of an on going problem: a preacher shortage. Gap ministers so that some can be found to stand in the gap.

Now I want to read part of an article written some 30 years after our Bible College time. The article is by Robert J. Young called, Where Have All the Preachers Gone: one of numerous articles when I searched the web for the topic- preacher shortage: (Quote)

“This increased demand for preachers is often coupled with a decreasing supply. This may not be readily apparent, for many young people are entering our Bible programs as students. In fact, approximately 1/3 of the male student population at Ohio Valley College are Bible majors. About one-fourth of these Bible majors complete the Greek language requirement for a Bachelor of Arts degree. Many of those Bible majors enroll in Hebrew. While this training is invaluable, such also suggests we are training more and more Bible students for graduate school and academic pursuits despite the strong ministry and missions focus we seek to foster. Talk to these Bible students and you will find that many of them hope to teach in the college classroom directly out of graduate school before they have any preaching experience. I also see fewer and fewer students in our Christian colleges who are "pure" Bible majors. Many of the young people we are training are double majors who are also training to be therapists, counselors, or vocational ministers. While these are good and worthy occupations, fewer and fewer young men want to preach--period! A student recently said to me, "I want a fallback position." My reply was, "As soon as the first hint of church trouble comes, you will quit preaching and go to your fallback position."

This problem can be observed not only in the college or university setting, but also in our churches. At Ohio Valley College, every summer we are overwhelmed by requests for ministry interns. We generally receive about three times as many requests as we can fill.

Add that more preachers than ever are quitting preaching and that even good preachers are quitting and the magnitude of the problem begins to focus.” (End Quote)

I have heard this question presented: Will there come a day in America when more missionaries will come in than go out? Will there come a time like Ezekiel wrote about when none will be found to stand in the gap?

And the shortage is not just with preachers for the churches. The shortage is across the board; in every area of service and ministry in the church and mission.

Back to our text: Paraphrased, Peter said something like this: brothers and sisters, we have a problem. We have a gap in our ministry and we need to fill it. Who do we have; who will step up?

After the qualifications were met, there were two. Were there only two who qualified? Or, out of a hundred or so, only two stepped up. Surprising? Naw.

We all are aware of the statistic that 20% of the people do 80-90% of the work in any church. And for the size of congregation we have, we may beat those percentages. But, I'm selfish. I'm asking for more.

There will always be a gap to fill. It's an ongoing challenge in every church. People leave for a variety of reasons and need to be replaced.

People get mad at other people and quit serving or leave church, don't they? It's hard to believe, but people get mad at a preacher or other minister and quit serving or leave. In regards to this message, it really does not matter how or why the gaps come about, the fact is they will come; it's an ongoing challenge.

Two stepped up to fill the gap. One was chosen; one wasn't. God did the choosing, not man.

The world would say, one winner, one loser. I would disagree. I would say both were winners.

One reason is that I don't see from the text that either shouted, 'Oh! Pick me! Pick me!'

Another reason comes from considering what isn't said in the qualifications, but is there none-the-less.

Let's look at the qualification again: **choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² 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."**

One who has been with us the whole time – were these two in the crowd when Jesus said, **"²² Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.**

²³ "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. (Luke 6:22-23)

Were they present, or did they hear from the Twelve what John recorded about persecution? Jesus told the disciples, **¹⁸ "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."** (John 15:18-20)

Of those qualified, if there were more, two placed themselves in the hands of the Eleven, informed and as ready as they could possibly be for what the powers of darkness was going to throw at them- hatred, insults, rejection, persecutions, and more-, and allowed God to do the choosing. They stepped up to fill the gap. Both were winners in my opinion.

All across this great land of ours are churches both big and small who need people to step up and fill the gap. People, who, being as ready as they possible can be, to take the heat from the spiritual forces of darkness and, unfortunately, to shoulder the load and the criticism from those within the church who are reluctant to step up or have stepped down for whatever reason.

As I bring this message to a close, I want to remind you that God has a place and

calling for each of us in this church. The body needs each of us and God wants us to serve. We are to serve the greater good of the body in general and the interests of Christ, specifically. There is no room for competition, jealousy, or personal pride. Years from now when we are all gone there is only one thing that will matter, and it is the only thing that matters now: God's glory.

Medway Christian Church, just like the church down the road, has ministry gaps. Will those gaps be filled?

Closing thought: the possibility crossed my mind while trying to place myself in these two's sandals: did the Spirit bring to their minds some of their history; like when Isaiah saw the glory of God and thought he was ruined, but instead, heard the question "Who will go for us?" Isaiah responded: "Here am I Lord; send me!"