

Acts 1:12-26 – Church as Team – People, Pain Purpose

The first chapter of Acts gives us a glimpse of the first Christian community in the short time between the Ascension and Pentecost. We read:

“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” (Acts 1:13, ESV)

Q. What does it look like when a church is of “one accord” and people devote themselves to prayer? What practical steps can we take to make this a reality?

There are signs in the Gospels that Jesus’ brothers had not recognised him as the Messiah. John records in his Gospel that “...not even his brothers believed in him.” (John 7:5, ESV). But here we see Jesus’ family at the heart of the fellowship. The events of the resurrection may well have transformed their lives.

Q. Do you have family members or close friends who have yet to have a personal relationship with Jesus? If you like, name some whom you would like prayed for at the end of tonight’s study.

The treachery of Judas was an early scandal and crisis the church had to tackle. Peter told the believers:

“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.” (Acts 1:16, ESV)

In one of his post-resurrection conversations, Jesus told the disciples:

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled? Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...” (Luke 24:44-45, ESV)

Q. Why is it so important to understand God’s great plans for his creation that are revealed in the Bible? How should we see this moment in history between Pentecost and the Jesus’ return? Where do we fit into this story?

Peter made the case that Judas should be replaced with:

“...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...” (Acts 1:22-23, ESV)

Here is Moses’ prayer shortly before the Israelites entered the Promised Land:

“Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.” (Numbers 27:16-17, ESV)

Q. If the church is a flock it needs shepherds – what are the qualities the Bible teaches us to look for in leaders, and how can we support people with the responsibility of keeping the wolves at bay? What dangers can emerge in churches, how can these be countered, and how can people who have been hurt be helped and healed?

The church put forward two men, Barsabbas and Matthias, to replace Judas among the 12 apostles. A vital requirement for the role was to have witnessed every stage of Jesus’ ministry, from the time of his baptism onwards.

Q. Before his ascension, Jesus told the apostles they would be his “witnesses”. As someone who knows the forgiveness of Jesus and his reality in your life, do you think of yourself as a “witness” to him? What opportunities would you like to let others know about his presence in your life? (Pray for these at the end of the study)

The church didn’t have a vote on which of the two men should get the job. Rather, they prayed:

“You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”
(Acts 1:24-25, ESV)

They recognised that God knows what is really in a person’s heart, as God told Samuel when the prophet was looking for the successor to Saul:

“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature... man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7, ESV)

Q. How can we put God at the heart of our decision-making, in our personal and work lives, in our families and in the church? How can we avoid judging by appearances or simply by the qualities that put someone on-track for promotion at work?

The church cast lots and Matthias replaced Judas among the Apostles. We don’t hear anything more about him in the New Testament.

Q. Who are the quiet Christians who are certainly not famous but have blessed your life immeasurably?