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Dear Reader,

*And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias;
And he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:15-26)*

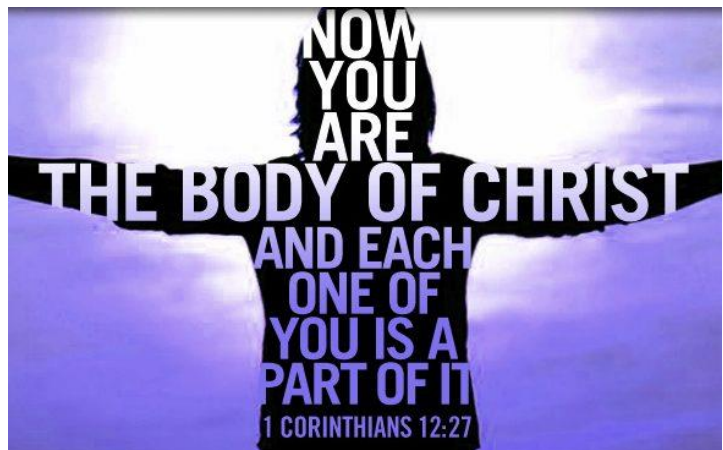
Can you believe it! Did the disciples of Jesus really flip a coin, toss a dice or pick a straw to choose a successor following the death of Judas? How would you feel if the Church simply cast lots to find a new Vicar or Bishop? Surely if the last incumbent was a bad lot the followers of Jesus would have taken a bit of care rather than relying on chance!

The first Chapter of Acts is all about a time of transition and a change in leadership. Jesus, the man, is dead and gone. For a period of time, that is 40 days, the risen Lord taught and inspired his closest friends as they prepared for change and responsibility. He told them to get themselves ready to receive this Holy Spirit - this Spirit would guide them, comfort them, and challenge them but above all else remain with them as they set out to go and tell his story to the nations and the "ends of the earth". After the death of Judas, when their number which once represented the twelve tribes of Israel is diminished, and after the Ascension, that is when their Lord is taken from their sight, the closest friends of Jesus know they must sort out the structure of the early church if they are to fulfil God's mission in the world.

Peter makes it clear that one person must be chosen to replace Judas and the individual must have known Jesus personally. That is the only qualification for the role. Why? Because this fledgling community is to be the new Israel of God and witness to the messianic kingdom brought to birth by Jesus' death and resurrection. There were "about one hundred and twenty persons" present to hear Peter's speech and they nominate two candidates who qualify to be elected. We have no idea what gifts they will bring to the task of preaching the gospel or proclaiming the kingdom of God, we simply know their names. There are just two candidates; Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and also Matthias. The believers pray that God will reveal the one to be chosen and then they cast lots. Matthias is chosen.

Did something go wrong with the process? After all Matthias is not mentioned again. Perhaps they should have waited until Pentecost, for the guidance and coming of the Spirit? Did the disciples put church structures before the wind and fire of the Spirit and simply choose someone made in their own image who became so insignificant that he barely deserved this mention? If that's true we should take note! And what about the candidate who failed to be appointed? What happened to Joseph known as Justus? We have no idea because like the one chosen he is not mentioned again in scripture.

It's so easy to imagine a mistake was made in this appointments process. We all know, or think we know, how to make good appointments both in the workplace and in our churches. We interview our candidates, explore their qualifications, ensure as best we can that they are well suited to the job. We learned all this long ago when we picked our teams in the playground, where the child who cannot kick, throw or catch is never chosen. We understand how to build teams by choosing the most gifted, the strongest, the overall best candidate. But this is not how God works. Nobody expected, "anything good to come out of Nazareth" and even King David was, if you like, "the runt of the litter".



How strange that the gathered congregation and the remaining eleven believed that casting lots was the way to determine God's will. "Ip, dip, sky blue, who's it not you". Simple, fast and effective. So why, if God was truly involved in the selection process, do the winner and the loser both disappear from view? Why does Matthias not join the ranks of biblical greats called to play their part in God's own story alongside Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, James and John? Even the Beloved Disciple who has no name has a story to tell. Instead, the man who follows the betrayer fades from sight. Perhaps I should try to explain what happened by telling you that Matthias (and possibly also Justus) were really there on the day of Pentecost because "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages"? Ah, perhaps that's the explanation – all the believers were and are equal even if it appears that some are more equal than others.

As I think back over my Christian journey I am grateful for numerous individuals whose names will never be carefully written or engraved in lists of Vicars at the back of churches but whose gentle words, acts of kindness and undeserved forgiveness have inspired me on my way. I am grateful to those, whose presence in the pews, have taught me how to love the broken, the hurting and the unlovely. Each and every one of those whose memory I treasure has, inspired by the Spirit, been a small yet utterly significant part of the Body of Christ.

For more than 2000 years countless people, perhaps like Justus who lost the toss have passed on the story of Jesus. This week a number of people have contacted me asking to be married in church or to have their child baptised. Who on earth told them about Jesus? It certainly wasn't me. When we gather in church tomorrow to worship our risen and ascended Lord, each one of us will be there because somebody, somewhere, once upon a time told them about Jesus. Thank God!

Yours in Christ,

Vicki
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