12-18 May 2024

How God uses our distinctiveness

Acts !: 15-17, 21-26

**15**In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)**16**and said, “Brothers and sisters,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+1%3A+15-26&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26940a)] the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. **17**He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

**21**Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living 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 nominated 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.

**Bible notes**

Jesus’ disciples are in Jerusalem, obedient to his command ‘to wait there for the promise of the Father’ (1:4). They are already a sizeable group of men and women, including Jesus’ mother and his brothers. But of the twelve, always named in the Gospels with a note that Judas was the one who betrayed him, only eleven now remain. Jesus’ calling of twelve disciples was part of his mission to renew Israel. Jacob’s sons, ‘the twelve patriarchs’, are recalled by Stephen (Acts 7:8) and the connection between the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles is affirmed in John’s vision of the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12-14). Judas had been allotted his share in the ministry, and the Greek word used for ‘share’ (v.17) is the same as that used for ‘lot’ (v.26). It was traditional to choose people by drawing of lots (see 1 Chronicles 24-25), but first the qualifications for being a candidate must be checked. The qualifications essential to apostolic witness are to have been with Jesus and his disciples from the beginning, a personal witness to Jesus’ baptism, doing good and healing, his crucifixion and resurrection (cf. Acts 10:37-41). When replacing the disobedient Saul, Samuel listened to God, ‘The Lord looks on the heart’ and anointed David (1 Samuel 16:6-13). And the pattern is the same here as Matthias is chosen by lot for this particular ministry. We hear of the Jewish Christian ‘twelve’ only once more, as they lay hands on seven Greek Christians who will take the gospel out to Samaria and into the world (6:1-6).

### ****Reflection****

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

All are called. Some are called to specific ministries, some to share gifts in other and more general ways. Joseph and Matthias were willing and open to God’s call – are we? Do you have a gift that could fulfil a role in the church or community? God acknowledges our gifts when he calls us, but that doesn’t mean we won’t be challenged. A calling may be affirmed through a process of application or selection. It may involve training. It may lead to a formal recognition or commissioning (or ordination). It may involve something far less visible. Whichever, while we don’t cast lots these days, the recognition of a calling has recognition and backing from the wider community.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

**Questions**

* What unique qualities do you bring to your church community to add warmth, variety and flavour?
* How will you affirm the God-given gifts of others in your group or congregation this week?
* Are there skills or talents that you might like to use for God?
* Spend some time thinking about how you might do this.

## 

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

We thank you, God, for all our experiences.  
Painful or pleasant, they make us as we are.  
May we allow them to be used for your glory.  
We thank you for our ministers, who have responded to your call  
to share their gifts and experiences with us.  
Help us all to draw closer to each other and to you.   
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Lord, help us to know ourselves better and to reflect on your call to us.  
Give us grace to use our gifts to honour you and to serve others.  
Help us to work together for the good of all.  
**Amen.**