

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for May 13, 2018
Seventh Sunday of Easter



THE READINGS

First Reading: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, ¹⁶ “Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus-- ¹⁷ for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. . .

²¹ “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.”

²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Worth Noting: If this passage does nothing else, it generates lots of questions. Why does Acts include the selection of Matthias, who lived in obscurity until his selection and promptly returned to obscurity afterwards? Why didn't Jesus, who had forty days with the disciples to reorganize the group after his Resurrection, name Judas' replacement before his Ascension? Why was selection by lots (a method never used again)? Now that's an effective passage!

Psalm 1

¹ Happy are those
 who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
 or sit in the seat of scoffers;
² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,

and on his law they meditate day and night.

³They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Worth Noting: What might it mean to you to meditate on the law day and night? Don't you have other obligations that would interfere? Were the good people of the psalmist's day less occupied than you?

Second Reading: 1 John 5:9-13

⁹If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. ¹⁰Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Worth Noting: This letter references the name of Jesus, Son of God, three times (1 John 2:12; 3:34; 5:13). The Gospel reading references the name of the Father. Acts of the Apostles describes the apostles acting in Jesus' name, announcing the forgiveness of sins (for example, Acts 2:38) healing (Acts 3:6; 16:18) and suffering (Acts 5:41; 9:16). Jesus' name has power. What is it to "believe in the name of the Son of God"? What is it to use the name of the Son of God?

Gospel: John 17:6-19

[Jesus said "Father"] ⁶I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

¹² While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Worth Noting: In verse 19, Jesus “sanctifies himself,” placing himself exclusively in the service of God. Then he asks that his disciples be sanctified in the same way, that they and all his followers, including those in the 21st century, be devoted exclusively to the service of God. Is that what discipleship requires? Is that what people sign up for in baptism?

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scriptures

The Gospel of John relies on one word, “world,” to express at least three concepts. First of all, John refers to the entire created universe as in John 1:10 “he was in the world and the world came to be through him.” The world may also be the object of God’s love and Jesus’ ministry, as in 3:16 “for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that everyone who believes in him might not be destroyed but have live everlasting” (*Journeying* translation). In the current selection from Jesus’ final discourse, the world represents everything that rejects Jesus and his teaching. In this last sense, the world stands opposed to the City of God, right relationships among God, humanity, and all creation.

Why would Jesus not pray on behalf of the fallen world? Does this not contradict what Jesus says in other Gospels that he came not for the sake of the righteous, those already saved, but on behalf of sinners (Mark 2:17 and parallels)? Consistency, we are told, is the hobgoblin of small minds, and we would not be accused of being small-minded Christians, but still: Isn’t the Gospel of John supposed to be the Gospel of Love?

Consider for whom Jesus was praying. The community of John, without doubt saw the references to those whom the Father gave to Jesus as applying to themselves. As a community seeing itself besieged, they may have brushed aside any attempt to broaden the category to include their neighbors, some following Mithras or other deities, and some gathering each Saturday in the synagogue down the street. Need we be so exclusive? Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of his sheep who do not belong to this fold (John 10:16). Might Jesus be including those as ones given him by the Father?

Working at Starbucks

May I tell a story?

I often work in public places – especially cafes and coffee houses – usually with titles like *The Greek New Testament* on the table around me. Once in a while someone takes note and initiates a conversation (Note: most people avoid “Bible thumpers”). One man engaged

me in conversation with the obvious intent of “saving my soul.” Our conversation did not go well, but, as it drew to a close, he asked if we could pray together. I declined. From my standpoint, his prayer was not an expression of our communion but of our division, of his judgment that I was among the unsaved.

With hindsight, maybe I was the one who was too judgmental and maybe I was too self-righteous. Nevertheless, could it be that Jesus, politely respecting the conscience and free will of “sinners” here let them be? Christians believe that sinners and a sinful world could not exist without the presence of God’s love. Jesus loves sinners, those who choose to reject him. Might they rebuff his prayers for them, seeing this as one more imposition on their own personhood?

Questions for Discussion

How often does the name of Jesus come up in your daily experience? How do you react?

Do you pray for unbelieving friends and relatives? What is it you hope will happen?

When your community talks about “the world,” what do they most often mean – the natural world? the web of human institutions? popular culture? Does your community judge the world essentially evil, neither good nor evil, fallen but redeemable, or something else?



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