

## **May 16, 2021, Easter 7, Acts 1:15-17, 21-26**

Have you ever looked back and thought about how things might have turned out differently? For instance, in fact me being here speaking to you this morning might not have happened if just one or two seemingly unconnected events had taken a different turn.

I am here this morning because, 14 years ago Pastor Kiser accepted a call to Memorial Lutheran Church in Shippensburg, leaving a vacancy here at St. Mark's. I was called to fill that vacancy, in part, because of my prior experience here which was the result of my being assigned here as a seminarian in 1996 which was the result of my wife's recognition of my call to ministry a few years before that, which was dependent on me meeting my wife almost 15 years before that which was dependent on my sister getting a job where Marian was a manager, etc. etc. etc.

If any of those events had not happened, or if they had happened differently, I might not be here today, and if any number of events in any of your lives had happened differently, you might not be here today either.

How do we explain how and/or why things happen the way they do? Can we ever fully understand why we are where we are when we are there? Is it Coincidence? Is there some plan to it all? Is there a reason or do we say it is God's plan? Are we here by chance or have we been chosen to be wherever we are whenever we are there doing whatever it is we might be doing?

I will not attempt to give a definitive answer to that question, but I will offer my un-definitive opinion; I think some things happen by chance, some things are God's plan in action, and some things are a combination of the two. How is that for taking a stand firmly on the fence?

But since the overarching goal of all Christians is to do God's will and answer God's call, how can we know whether we are operating by chance or whether we have been chosen?

Essentially, it takes prayer and careful discernment to hear and answer God's call.

Apparently, according to our reading from Acts this morning, the disciples were quite open to the guiding hand of God in the events of our lives, especially the workings of the church. After Judas' death they needed someone to take his place, and they made the choice by casting lots! Of course, they fervently prayed before pulling straws, but still, can you even imagine choosing church leadership today by casting lots? No interviews, no recommendations from the Synod, no call committee, no trial sermon, and worst of all, no meet and greet dinner!

Was it simply good luck or bad luck for Matthias that the lot fell on him, or was he chosen by God? I think the scriptures make it pretty clear that Matthias was chosen, not just the victim or beneficiary of circumstance.

Up until now, neither Matthias nor Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus (talk about an identity crisis!) had been front men among the disciples. They followed Jesus from back in the pack, among the 120 in the crowd. Suddenly they were thrown into the spotlight and Matthias took his place among the leaders who grew the church from those 120 believers to a worldwide phenomenon. 120 is less than our average attendance in a so-called normal year. Just

imagine what might happen if we all answered God's call, as Matthias did. Who knows, we might even start a community-wide phenomenon right here in Colonial Park!

Think back over your life. Have there been times when the lot might have fallen on you, but you did not respond as Matthias did? Maybe you thought there must have been some mistake, that you were not the right person for the job. Maybe you thought you were not outgoing enough, or educated enough, or something else enough. Perhaps the lot then fell on someone else who, in the end, did not do as well as you know you could have done.

Now, think about the future. I can almost guarantee there will be opportunities right here at St. Mark's when we will be seeking someone to do ministry and the proverbial lot will be cast for you. We will soon be back to full speed ahead and will be looking for those who served in the past and those with gifts for the future to get and keep this ship moving. Everyone here, everyone watching the recorded service, and everyone in any way connected to this congregation has something to offer for the building up of the church, the Body of Christ.

We do not choose leadership by lottery, but perhaps we should. We could put every members name in a hat and draw names to serve on various ministries. To improve stewardship, we could do the same, draw name and an amount and count on whoever is drawn to provide the amount picked. How many of us would be willing to have our ministry determined by the casting of lots, even if it is preceded by fervent prayer? My guess is not many.

Today we discern God's call in different ways. Prayer, meditation, discussion with fellow Christians, that tug on your heart that says, "you can do this, you *should* do this", are all ways to lot is being cast for your response. One of my favorite pieces of "bumper sticker theology" is the slogan, "God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called".

Lord, you know everyone's heart, show us what you have chosen us to do by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Amen.