

Justus or Matthias
May 20, 2012
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.” *18*(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. *19*This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) *20*“For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘Let another take his position of overseer.’ *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.

This episode in the life of the disciples happens just after Jesus ascended into heaven and just before the coming of the Holy Spirit. The problem is that the disciples are short-staffed. Judas, we are told, bought a field with his blood money. He then fell down in his field, burst open in the middle, and basically spilled his guts. It was a dramatic and tragic end for the betrayer. It was also a problem for the surviving disciples. You can’t have eleven disciples you have to have twelve. Twelve is a nice Biblical number. There were twelve tribes in Israel. Jesus called twelve disciples. It was in their by-laws; twelve apostles.

Somewhere along the way they went from being called disciples to apostles – and there is a technical difference. A disciple is one who is called. An apostle is one who is sent. Jesus called disciples, he sent apostles to take his gospel message to the ends of the earth.

The candidate for the twelfth apostle, Judas’ replacement, had to have been with them from the very beginning, from the baptism of John to the Ascension. The appropriate candidate had to be a witness to the resurrection. You would think that after the Judas debacle they might look for someone of upstanding character or excellent public speaking skills. Instead, they wanted someone who had walked the entire journey with Jesus. Two candidates met the criteria, Justus and Matthias. One of the eleven offered up a prayer asking God to make the final decision. Then they cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he became number 12.

You don’t often hear much about casting lots but this week the idea of casting lots to make a decision between two candidates was in the news. In a little bedroom community of Lubbock, Texas two men tied for a seat on the city council. They each received 118 votes. The cost of a run-off election was said to be \$10,000 and neither man wanted the city to have to bear the burden of that expense. In Texas there are two other options in the event of a tie. Either one candidate has to concede the election or some form of casting lots.

The two men decided on a coin toss and the city attorney spent the week working up a three-page document laying out the rules of the toss to make it fair. On Friday afternoon, the coin was tossed and the winner declared. The election concluded with a handshake between opponents.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hoTmjO_A2Fn3AUou9IEeV7B2D_uA?docId=7386bdf44ea64806afb7712e2227b801 (visited Friday, May 18, 2012)

Casting lots to pick the twelfth apostle was serious business. They wanted nothing more or nothing less than God's choice to fill the position Judas left vacant. This was the first congregational meeting of the Christian Church. Five minutes after Jesus left the meetings began.

This passage, at first glance, seems like boring church business. Big yawn. But what intrigues me is the fact that they stopped to ask what God wanted. I'm not sure we always do that. Sometimes we get caught up in business as usual and we forget to ask: What IS God's vision for God's church? What is our role in God's mission to the world?

The other day I ran across a post by a religion professor named David Lose. The Title of the post was "Ten Things Churches Can Learn from Apple Stores." (daily devotional *In the Meantime*, sent May 18, 2012). The Apple Store is the most profitable retailer in America. Here are the ten things with Dr. Lose's translation for church life:

1. Stop selling stuff. When Steve Jobs started the Apple store he didn't ask how he could sell more stuff, instead he asked, "How do we enrich people's lives?" Translation: stop worrying about membership and getting people to join – the church's equivalent to selling stuff. Instead ask people why they're here, why they've come, and what they're looking for and how this congregation can aid them in their walk with God.
2. Enrich lives – when you enrich lives, magical things start to happen. Translation: Strengthen faith. Set your congregation the vision of imagining that every aspect of their life – worship, education, facilities, newsletter, and all the rest – is intended to help people strengthen their faith and grow in their lives as disciples. What would it mean if before each action, decision, or vote, you asked the question, "How will this help strengthen the faith of the people who come here?"
3. Hire for smiles – Apple employees are hired as much for their magnetic personalities as their technical expertise. Translation: Not everyone has the gift of hospitality but many do – recruit these people to get out in front and welcome everyone who walks in the door.
4. Celebrate Diversity – Apple hires people who reflect the diversity of their customers, not people who fit a certain mold. Translation: Just how welcoming can we be? Have we created a place where our kids and their friends feel welcome even if they're dressing differently than when we were young? Have we created a place where neighbors who may look different, have different levels of education, or dress differently feel welcome? Do we need to work harder at making room for all kinds of different people to find their place in our congregation?
5. Unleash inner genius – teach your customers something they never knew they could do before, and they'll reward you with their loyalty. Translation: Everyone in your congregation has something of value to offer. People feel more connected when they believe their gifts are appreciated and will be used. Imagine if the church was a place where everyone from our youth to our retirees felt that their creative gifts were not just valued but were vital to the health of the congregation?
6. Empower employees – Apple employees are empowered to do what they believe is the right thing to do. Translation: Don't let the pastors do it all. How else will our people be equipped and empowered to read the Bible with confidence, to connect their faith to their daily lives, and to share their faith with others if the only persons whoever do these kinds of things are the pastors? We learn by doing.

7. Sell the benefit – Apple store specialists are taught to sell the benefit behind products and customize those benefits for the customer. Translation: Practice talking about why we choose to be a person of faith and belong to this particular community of faith. If you can't answer the question: "What does it mean to you to be a follower of Jesus Christ?" How can you communicate the value of being a follower with others? Practice answering the question.

8. Follow the steps of service – Apple employees are taught to follow five steps in each and every interaction. They are outlined by the acronym A-P-P-L-E. They are: Approach with a customized warm greeting, Probe politely to understand the customer's needs, Present a solution the customer can take home today. Listen for and address unresolved questions. End with a fond farewell and an invitation to return. Translation: Take hospitality seriously.

9. Create a multisensory experience – let people see, touch, and play with products. Translation: reclaim the fact that church is a multi-sensory experience: we have music, words, images, bread and juice, and real flesh and blood people around us.

10. Appeal to the buying brain – An apple store is spacious, clean, well-lit, and uncluttered. Translation: What are we doing that we don't need to do? How can our space and our activities be de-cluttered and simplified?

Steve Jobs had his vision for the Apple Store. What is God's vision for the church? What motivates us? Is it to fill pews – pay pills – fill slots on committees – follow by-laws? Or is it something else? Can we clearly articulate that something else?

What we have in our story for today is a group of people seeking to follow the founder's vision. We have people praying that they might do God's will and not their own will. We have people waiting for and believing in the power of the Holy Spirit to equip them to do God's work in the world as the body of Christ. We have people who are committed and excited because they believe in the vision.

What about us? What does God want for us? We can never stop asking.....