**Waiting for the Holy Spirit**

As I was writing this sermon the weather had begun to warm up considerably which, of course, turns our minds to-----golf. I’m sure you’ve all started preparing for another great season of pars and birdies and eagles.

Have I ever told you the story about this couple who loved to golf together? Every Thursday they took a day off from work and played 18 holes at one of the local courses. Well, the wife got cancer and the sickness affected her ability to play.

One night as they lay in bed she asked him if he planned to continue golfing after she died. “*I imagine I will*” he responded. “*I love to golf*.”

         “*I want you to find another lady partner to golf with like we do*.” she said.

         “*I don’t know about that*,” he said. “*What we have is special*.”

         “*Really*,” she said, “*I want you to be happy and I know how much you love golfing*.”

         “*You’re right*,” he responded. “*I guess I probably will find someone*.”

         She looked at him thoughtfully and asked, “*Will you give her my golf clubs?*”

         “*Oh no*,” he said, “*those are yours and besides, she’s left handed*.”

One does not easily replace someone as important as your golfing partner, I mean your wife.

I’m not making light of losing your life partner. Several here have gone through the pain of losing your husband or wife. I’ve been blessed to have Lisa alongside me for over 42 years, but I’ve gone through the loss with you.

Some have been blessed with another love. In my observation, you don’t replace someone. You will always remember and love him or her. If you do happen to fall in love and perhaps marry another, he or she doesn’t replace your first love. At best he may fill the role your first love filled.

Something else I’ve observed, when you lose someone, you’re very careful about making a commitment to a new man or woman. You don’t commit to the first person who comes along. If someone is going to fill the role in your life that your spouse had filled, you want the right person.

As we move along in our study of the Book of Acts, we see that the followers of Jesus intended to find someone fill Judas’ place among the Apostles of Christ. He wouldn’t replace Judas. This new man would not do the same things Judas did nor will he be the same person Judas was.

We see also that they carefully vetted the new guy. Not just anyone can be an Apostle. This was such an important role, this man would have to be carefully tested before joining the ranks of The Twelve.

Last week we looked at chapter 1:1-11. We saw that Jesus gave final instructions to His followers and then was then taken to Heaven. BTW, that had to be an awesome sight. Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. We pick up in verse 12,

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying.*

*Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.* Acts 1:12-14

A Sabbath Day’s walk, *tahum ha-sabbath*, was about 2000 cubits. A cubit was the distance from a man’s elbow to fingertips. For me that’s about 19 ½ inches. More precisely defined a Hebrew cubit was 17.5 inches, different than an Egyptian cubit of 17.6 inches or Babylonians cubit of 19.8 inches. Do the math and the Mount of Olives was about 1000 yards from Jerusalem. It was typical of Luke to approximate the distance.

In Jerusalem they went to *The Upper Room”.* Luke used a direct “the” to indicate a specific upper room. I surmise that this was the same room where they had eaten the “*Last Super*” and where Jesus instituted Communion, the Lord’s Supper. That *Upper Room* was essentially the first Christian Church building.

I don’t think the text intends to suggest that they spent all of their time, including eating and sleeping in *The Upper Room*. This is where the followers of Jesus gathered to wait for the Holy Spirit.

They were afraid of the same Jewish authorities who had arranged Jesus’ death and they were uncertain what they should do now that Jesus was gone.

At this time the church is waiting for the Holy Spirit. Here in chapter 1:12-26 we learn what those believers did while waiting for the Holy Spirit.

1.    **They prayed**. If you’ve ever wondered about Biblical precedent for the church praying together you have it right here. It’s clear that this was the whole church, about 120 people, gathering to pray.

I believe my greatest failure as the minister of this church is that I haven’t challenged and urged our congregation to regularly gather as one for prayer. I offer this, not as an excuse but as a reason, it’s discouraging to promote a church-wide prayer service, then see so few of the church actually come together to pray.

I realize we’re all busy, but you know, for over a year now, every first and third Wednesday evenings we have a small group who gather to pray. It’s well promoted, still there are only about 8 members of our church who make it as a priority. We’re not all busy every first and third Wednesday.

How do I get people to gather to pray? Should flatter you I beg you answer? Should I threaten or cajoled or plea? Should I brood or sort of romance you to come and prayer? (I borrowed that from the musical Camelot.) Those methods won’t work. The best I can do is love you when you come.

That little church in Jerusalem gathered in the Upper Room to pray. They wanted to connect with Jesus. They wanted to know and understand His will. They wanted to follow His leadership. They wanted His power in their church as they took the Gospel externally.

I challenge and urge you to make prayer a priority, including group prayer. I know you all pray at home in your private devotional time but we’re missing the dynamic of a body, focused as one, calling out to Jesus to work in and through us.

Jesus said, “*I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”* Matthew 18:19f

There’s power in praying together. There’s power in praying in unity. A praying church will unleash the power of God in ways that a non-praying church never will. I hope I will see you Wednesday evenings.

2.    The second thing Jesus’ followers did in *The Upper Room* while waiting for the Holy Spirit is **they reconciled relationships**.

Notice how Luke spelled out who were the church:

         11 Apostles who had travelled with Jesus

         “The women”. This probably included Mary Magdalene, perhaps Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus.

         Luke also identified Jesus’ mother Mary as well as Jesus’ brothers which would include James of Acts 15 and the Book of James.

         Verse 15 tells us that totals about 120 people.

Parenthetical note: There was another group of believers in Galilee. According to 1 Corinthians 15:6 Jesus appeared after His resurrection to about 500 followers.

This group of 120 people were not a unified body yet. There had been some cracks in the fellowship.

         Peter betrayed Jesus. They all had but Peter’s betrayal was so public you can be sure the other guys had a problem with him.

         Thomas had doubted the testimony of the rest about seeing the Risen Jesus. That couldn’t have gone over well.

         James and John had tried to secure a special place for themselves with Jesus at the expense of the rest.

         What about Mary Magdalene? Did they want a former prostitute in their group?

         What about Nicodemus? He was a Pharisee, part of the Sanhedrin who ordered Jesus’ death. He ostensibly didn’t stop them.

         What about Joseph of Arimathea?

I don’t know what they did to overcome differences but it’s obvious they did. They couldn’t have been an effective witness for Jesus if there was division in the body.

There will always be differences between members but there doesn’t have to be division. Their love as brothers and sisters prevailed and they found unity.

3.    The third thing they did in that *Upper Room* was, **they chose someone to fill Judas Iscariot’s role** as an Apostle. They believed it was necessary that they be twelve. We’ll read the rest of this chapter:

*In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in this ministry.”*

*(With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)*

*“For,” said Peter, “it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, ‘May another take his place of leadership.’*

*Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 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.”*

*So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.* Acts 1:15-26

There must be something about the number 12; Twelve sons of Jacob became twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus called twelve Apostles.

As they had been taught by Jesus, the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament were important evidence of the story of Jesus.

Peter referenced Psalm 69:25 describing distain for the enemies of God and applied it to Judas, and Psalm 109:8 which he interpreted as a warrant for the appointment of a successor to Judas.

The qualifications for someone to be an Apostle were set forth here. Not anyone could be an Apostle. There were two qualifications:

**One**, the candidate had to have been part of Jesus entourage from the time of John the Baptist. That would be from the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

**Two**, the candidate had to have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus.

Remember what we said last week, these men would be the martyrs who testify of the truth about Jesus and they would suffer terribly for their testimony. If they weren’t certain of the truth they most likely would have turned to run when the persecution started. They already proved in the Garden of Gethsemane that they were prone to run away.

Whoever would fill Judas’ role would have to have complete knowledge of what Jesus did and taught as well as having seen Him alive after the resurrection.

Two men met those qualifications, “Joseph Barsabbas” and Matthias. Barsabbas means “son of Sabbath.” It’s quite possible that he was born on the Sabbath. His Roman name was Justus, “the righteous”.

According to Eusebius, a church leader around 300 AD, author of *Ecclesiastical History*, an early church history, Joseph when challenged by unbelievers, drank snake venom in the name of Jesus and suffered no outward consequences.

Matthias, according to Eusebius was one of the 70 disciples Jesus sent out two by two to prepare people to receive Jesus as the Messiah in Luke 10:1.

Having vetted potential candidates they settled on these two men, both of whom fit the qualifications. Since both men seemed to be equally qualified they cast lots to settle on just one.

There were many different ways to discern events or persons that cannot be determined by normal means.

         Rhabdomancy – throwing sticks into the air. Omens were deduced from how they landed.

         Hepatoscopy – examining the liver and entrails of a sacrificed animal for guidance.

         Teraphim – apparently like reading tarot cards.

         Necromancy – consulting the dead.

         Astrology – reading the stars, sun, and moon.

Most of these are considered divination and condemned by God. They chose to cast lots, like throwing dice. There is Biblical precedent for casting lots.

         In Leviticus 16:8 casting lots was used to determine which of two goats would be sacrificed and the other turned loose on the Day of Atonement.

         It’s believed that Joshua cast lots when he determined that it was Achan who had violated God’s command after Israel “fit the battle of Jericho.”

         When Israel divided up the Promised Land tribe by tribe they cast lots.

         In 1 Chronicles 24:5 lots were cast to assign Temple duties.

         Matthew 27:35, lots were cast to divide Jesus’ robe at His crucifixion.

It’s possible that the church had gotten ahead of God on this one. Certainly they were honest and sincere in selecting someone to complete the Twelve, but perhaps God had already chosen Saul to be number 12. We’ll never know until we get to Heaven.

Matthias was chosen to fill Judas’ place. Very little in know of Matthias. Even with Luke’s thorough research he makes no further mention of him. Whatever the case, Matthias was chosen and took his place among the Apostles to lead the church.

These men and women didn’t just sit quietly waiting for the Holy Spirit. They prayed, they unified, and they secured qualified leadership. I think we can learn from them as we seek the Holy Spirit to move in Agape Christian Church in 2018?

**First**, let’s view what we’ve talked about today from the context of waiting for the Holy Spirit. That’s what was going on in Acts 1. Let me add, waiting includes anticipating. They expected the Holy Spirit.

If we’re going to effectively go into all the world and proclaim the good news of salvation through faith in Christ, we have to have the power of the Holy Spirit. Individually and corporately we have to have the Holy Spirit working in and through us.

A church can do a lot on the strength of its people. We can provide food for the poor; we can minister to the sick; we can comfort the grieving; we can model good citizenship and neighborliness. But without the Holy Spirit we’ll not testify about Jesus the way He called us to.

If the Holy Spirit is working in and through us everything we do will testify of Jesus.

If we’re working from our own strength, we’re just being nice people, not unlike any service club in town. With the Holy Spirit, we’re martyrs of Christ.

**Second**, if we’re going to effectively go into all the world and proclaim the good news of salvation through faith in Christ, we must be a praying church. We have to find a way to overcome our apathy toward praying together and make it a priority.

**Third**, we need unity. We don’t have to agree on everything, but we really need to be united. We can disagree on some things and still love and support every brother and sister in the congregation. When there is division we should seek reconciliation.

Of course it’s not always possible. Too often we refuse to even talk about differences. We ignore them and simply live with the tension. Differences are OK but if they cause division there needs to be reconciliation.

How important is reconciliation? Jesus said, *if you’re holding your tithes and offering in your hand but remember that a brother has something against you, leave your gift right there in front of the altar and go be reconciled*. (Matthew 5:23f)

We testify about Jesus when we do what He says. He said, *love your enemy, pray for whoever persecutes you, do not retaliate against someone who harms you*. That’s not the way of the world. The world says “*assert yourself*”. Jesus says “*Deny yourself*”.

Some people have enough of the world in them that they will resist any attempt to reconcile. You can’t change them, you can only do your part. But do it!

**Fourth**, if we’re going to effectively go into all the world and proclaim the good news of salvation through faith in Christ, we have to have qualified leadership. Our leaders are not Apostles, still we seek qualified men and women to lead.

We’re very careful in choosing leaders, trusting God to assist us. We vet according to the qualifications listed in the Bible for Elders and Deacons. We ask the congregation to make known your support for each man or woman individually.

By following what God has given us in His Word we know that we’re aligned with His will and purpose. When we are aligned with God’s will and purpose, we know that whatever we do as a church truly testifies that Jesus lives and Jesus saves.

Let’s be externally focused, like that little church in Jerusalem, filled with the Holy Spirit, testifying that Jesus is the Son of God.