

The Lord Knows Your Heart

Texts: I John 5:9-13, Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

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If you are familiar with the liturgical calendar, then you know that this is the last Sunday before the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes upon the people gathered in Jerusalem. Now the apostles and the group are gathered together after witnessing Jesus' ascension into heaven, and Peter gets up to speak to the crowd of about 120. They need to choose a replacement for Judas in their midst – someone to help carry on the apostolic mission that Jesus entrusted to them. Who will it be? How will they decide?

In the first Scripture reading for this morning, we read, “We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony.” It is about faith and belief in the Son – in Jesus the Savior. As this group of early church leaders considers what is next – and who is next to serve among them, faith is an important bedrock for the replacement. Peter tells them, “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, beginning with 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.”

Choose one of the men who have been with the group the whole time, someone who is personally familiar and a witness to all that Jesus said and did during His time on earth. By holding to this standard, Peter is advocating that the replacement be someone who is grounded in faith and have enough invested to be committed to their beliefs and faith. The leaders decide to nominate two men – Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen.”

The Lord knows your heart and where you are in your faith. He knows from where your growth in faith has come and where your sticking points in growth are. Knowing that, we are challenged to examine and look at our own individual hearts to see where we are in our faith walk with Christ. How can we be more committed to the cause of Christ in our daily lives? What areas of our faith need some attention? How do our hearts more fully and openly embrace and live out our faith in Jesus Christ? Spending time in prayer, having an active and growing devotional life and intentional time of study of God's Word, serving God through the church or in our own circles, tithing our times and talents. These are all ways that we can assess our faith and make steps toward growth.

It struck me this week in the passage from I John, which Roger read, that John was writing so that his readers would have the assurance in their faith despite whatever they were going through at that time. He wanted them to be strengthened with that assurance. We need that same assurance in these days in which we live. When things are tough – when we do not understand or are frustrated by what we see – when we wonder what to believe with all the voices around us, we need to be rooted in our faith. We need to have the Lord to know our hearts and to show us.

As a church, we need that same assurance. Think about the situation in which Peter and the others find themselves. Two men are nominated as possibilities to take Judas' place. It seems easy enough, but I would imagine that there was more to it than what the text says. I would bet that emotions were still raw amongst the group. It has only been a short time since Judas betrayed Jesus and then took his own life from the guilt and shame of that betrayal. Sure, things worked out okay – more than okay – as Jesus defeated death and rose from the dead,

appeared to them, and then ascended to heaven before their eyes. However, they find themselves without Him now, knowing that they need to move forward in carrying out God's plan.

And so, they gather to fill this position. 2 men – with qualifications to be apostles. They pray, "Show us, Lord." Then, they put the decision in God's hands and let the lots determine God's choice. Matthias is the pick, and he will now fulfill the role of apostle. I think this passage emphasizes the importance of prayer and process in the church's mission. As Presbyterians, we love doing things decently and in order – maybe the kind of order that is displayed here in the Scripture text. Did you notice that there is no mention of objection to the process or division between those gathered on how they were going to do their work? As a church, we are also called to pray about all things.

As we think about our future, about the how and logistics of fully reopening, your Session is praying. And I hope that you are too. Pray that God would show us the way – and how to fully reopen in the right and safe way. As we look ahead to what ministry is going to look like as the state and our church move toward that full reopening, we pray. And pray. And pray some more. Things are going to be different on all fronts when things go back to what we will call normal. Pray. That God would show us how to fulfill His mission and purpose in a post-pandemic world.

"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." God is active in the lives of His children. The apostles knew that God was in their midst and wanted their choice for next apostle to be God's choice and not theirs. They took very seriously the fact that God was in control and that He was going to guide them in all things. He would show them not only who the new

apostle would be, but as we will see next week, how the church would be born and begin to be established to grow and expand.

In the same way, God is active in our lives as well. He gives to us – life and more. God shows us and cares for us. And that is why He knows our hearts. God knows and understands our quirks and hot button issues. God knows what gives us life – the things that energize us and inspire us. Yes, the Lord even knows what gets us down and what we need to pick us back up. God knows what we have been through over the last year – how we have each been impacted by the pandemic, by being alone and isolated, and how our thoughts and views and beliefs have been shaped. God knows our hearts. God knows us.

And so, it comes down for us to faith, prayer, the state of our hearts, and life. Life in God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. What changes do you need to make? What attention do you need to give to any or all of these things? Let us each commit to approaching our God – the One who knows our hearts, who gives to us in faith and trust of His plan for our lives. And let us draw closer to Him and grow more into Him – beginning today. Let us pray...

Loving and merciful God, You alone know our hearts. You know what makes us tick and where we need to grow. You challenge us to make the changes in our lives so that we can more fully experience life in Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us, we pray, to be devoted to the things that can help us grow and stay connected with You. Through Christ we pray, Amen.