

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Easter 7, May 16, 2021

READINGS:

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Psalm 1

I John 5:9-13

John 17:6-19

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Reverend Jerrod McCormack once said in a sermon that "We live in the already and the not-yet of God's kingdom."

We live in the "already" and the "not-yet."

Our Gospel reading on this Sunday after Ascension Day is part of what is called the "High Priestly Prayer" of Jesus from John's Gospel. The setting for the prayer is the Last Supper, and the prayer is for his disciples with him in that hour, and also for all his disciples (us) who have come to believe in him through them, down the centuries.

Jesus prays for protection and unity and sanctification for his disciples as he sends them into the world, the "already" of their time, just as the Father sent him. And we, like all the other believers across the years, are sent into the "already" of our own time. Here we are, in Las Vegas, Nevada and in Bullhead City, Arizona, living each day of 2021 in the "already" of God's kingdom, and waiting for the coming of the "not-yet!"

For the disciples in our reading from Acts today, living in the "already" meant providing for complete leadership within the body by replacing Judas Iscariot. The eleven disciples needed the twelfth to take "his share" of their ministry.

For our diocese, as for those first disciples, living in the "already" means providing for leadership within the diocesan body by electing the Eleventh Bishop of Nevada at our Diocesan Convention in October. By that election, we will provide for complete leadership within our Diocesan body.

When we look, there are some striking similarities between the process the disciples used to fill the vacancy left by Judas, and the process we are using to call our new bishop today. Both processes involve a "pool" from which the candidates will come, prayer for the will of God in the choice, and a selection method acceptable in the "already" in which those calling for leadership live.

The disciples didn't just trot up to anybody on the street corner in search of Judas' replacement. No interviews like "Hey, are you a Roman citizen? Do you speak Greek? Want to be an apostle for Jesus?" Nope. Peter made it clear that the candidates would come from "the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us..." The call was to members of the community.

Our Search Committee hasn't just trotted out to run ads on the web to fill the position of Bishop of Nevada, either. The call is still to members of the community today. Candidates for bishop in the Episcopal Church must be ordained priests (which means they have also been ordained and served as deacons) in the Episcopal Church, and they must be at least 30 years old. And, elections must be consented to by a majority of Standing Committees and Bishops of the Church.

Prayer for the will of God was paramount in the selection process for the disciples. "Lord, you know everyone's heart," they prayed. "Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside..."

Prayer is still paramount in the selection process for our bishop. The Search Committee has circulated a prayer for our process and invited all of us to be in prayer for the will of God for our diocese. We have attached that prayer to the bulletin today, in English and in Spanish. The next few months are a great opportunity to make good use of it, as we ask God, who knows everyone's heart, to show us which of the candidates he has chosen to take the place of Bishop Dan in our Diocesan mission and ministry!

For the disciples, the will of God was manifested in the casting of lots for the two identified candidates, and the lot fell to Matthias, who made the eleven disciples whole again by becoming the twelfth among them. That was an accepted way to discern God's will in the "already" in which they lived.

For us, the will of God will be manifest in a way acceptable to the "already" in which we live today. We will discern God's will in the results of an election by secret ballot, making our diocese whole again with the selection of a bishop to lead us.

We live in the "already" and the "not-yet."

According to the scriptures, when Jesus parted from his disciples, he was carried up into heaven until a cloud hid him from their sight. We have met that cloud before in scripture as a usual way of telling us that God is present - think of the cloud that led the Israelites by day during the Exodus from Egypt, or on Mount Sinai as Moses talked with God, or at the Transfiguration.

With the return of Jesus to his Father, the "already" for the disciples changed. The job of witnessing to the coming of God's kingdom became theirs. Jesus had not prayed to his Father to remove them from the world, but he had prayed that they would be protected and unified in their witness to his coming and his resurrection. They were to carry on the work he had begun: to be faithful and true witnesses to the Good News, and to speak truth, create justice, and offer mercy in that new "already," while they waited for the "not-yet" of his promised return to gather them to himself.

Our "already" is different from theirs, and yet it is the same. We are included in Jesus' prayer for his disciples. Remember, he did not pray that we be removed from the world, but that we be protected and unified as we continue the work he began. We are to be faithful and true witnesses to the Good News, and to speak truth, create justice, and offer mercy in our world today, while we in our turn wait for the "not-yet" of his promised return.

Soon our Diocese will call a new bishop to take a share of our Diocesan ministry, and make that ministry whole again by joining with us to accomplish it. Jesus told the disciples they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. That is still our charge today. It is the charge of Elizabeth, Holly, Julia, and Robert, announced by our Standing Committee last Monday as the slate of candidates for Eleventh Bishop of Nevada.

We find that charge in the Baptismal Covenant: To the question, "Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?" we answer, "I will, with God's help."

Amen.