

I have to say I was little miffed about being given this reading to talk about!!

The first Church business meeting! Thanks! (no offence pcc)

But of course, on closer reading and a little bit of thinking..not too much! Makes my brain ache!

I realised that there a few valuable points for us to consider.

It is a good reminder that our Bibles are the word of God. It is God inspired and God breathed.

There is always something to challenge us, teach us, and prompt us to question and search for another glimpse of who God is.

Let's set the scene first.

The risen Jesus had spent time (40 days), teaching and eating with the disciples. He had explained the Kingdom of God and how the Holy Spirit would come and empower them to fulfil the mission He had set before them. They were not alone.

Then Jesus was taken up to Heaven hidden in a cloud. Ascension Day. Today in our Church calendar actually. It is a day to celebrate Jesus as King.

The apostles knew He was without doubt, God.

And Heaven was his home.

Scripture tells us that they returned to Jerusalem, to wait.

At this point we believe that there were about 120 present. This included the disciples, and others who had faithfully followed Jesus, sharing that deep love and commitment.

You may notice at the beginning of Acts they have become Apostles. Why?

The word disciple means follower or learner. Apostle means messenger or missionary.

Their roles had changed. They had a mission to spread the Good News of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Son of God.

They were waiting and praying.

Can you imagine how that must have been?

They had just seen Jesus disappear after promising them The Holy Spirit.

Who knew how that looked??? They had no idea.

And they waited. Praying. In an upper room. This may well have been the same room in which the apostles had gathered for the last supper.

Waiting on God... so difficult. But they did not sit around doing nothing. Moaning and groaning about the wait, Judas, Jesus leaving. No.

This is a great example of waiting.... they did what they could; praying together, seeking Gods guidance and getting organised.

The first church business meeting.

Peter felt they needed to find a replacement for Judas.

Why did they need to have 12?

The number 12 is the symbolic unity of Israel. The people of God. It showed acceptance of Jesus' commission to be official witnesses of the resurrection.

They continue to pray, seeking Gods guidance and will.

They cast lots, it is certainly not entertained in church now, but at this time it had a respectable history in Hebrew lore.

Proverbs 16 v33 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord'.

It is really the attitude that is important, not the method.

They were leaning into their trust of God's goodness and divine guidance. Trusting in God's ability to speak and to then faithfully act on His response.

But my thoughts kept returning to Judas and his betrayal.

I cannot shake the devastation that the disciples must have felt about Judas.

He had been chosen by Jesus. He had chosen to follow Jesus.

Peter says in v17 'He was one of our number, and shared in this ministry.'

They had spent over 3 years together. Which was often intense, scary, mind blowing and awesome. They all witnessed the miracles, the parables, the healing, raising from the dead...

So many things.

They thought they knew him.

Were they upset and stunned by Judas' actions?

We have all experienced this in some form or another.

Developed relationships, personal, professional, or spiritual, where we thought the friendship, respect, love, was reciprocated. We thought we knew them and that they knew us. But it was not as it seemed.

There was smoke, mirrors, maybe lies and secrets.

These are often painful memories and we grieve the relationship that was lost because of a betrayal of trust.

I wonder how many of us are holding onto the past pain of betrayal.

Of course, it may be that our whole approach to new relationships has become damaged and we are suspicious of the reliability of new people in our lives. We lose confidence in our judgement

This limits us. Restricts our freedom in Christ and the future God has prepared for us.

It is hard to let it go and move on.

Peter speaks of Judas without bitterness or resentment. His focus is to the future. To move forward in the mission Jesus has set before them.

And this is the attitude we need to foster. Not easy, but with the help of God, achievable.

Please consider, praying with someone you trust if this is your experience. May you trust God's healing of your wounds, so that what remains are only faint scars.

We also should not forget Matthias. How must it have felt for him to take the place Judas had left?

I wonder how difficult it was for him to become and feel part of the team. A new member.

A newbie... We have all had that experience too. And remember feeling awkward and sometimes left out.

May those memories shape our welcome and response to those who join us, so that we truly share the love of God.

So, for what I initially thought was a dry and boring few verses we can take away several points...

Be prayerful in all our meetings, decisions and times of waiting;

Pray about the pain we hold onto so that it doesn't define us;

Focus on Jesus, moving forward and looking to the future;

And be genuinely welcoming to those new to us.

Let's pray,

Father, thank you that we can trust in you. When we are let down by others help us to move forward and leave the hurt at the foot of your cross. Knowing you want to heal us. Help us to be prayerful in all things, keeping you at the centre. And fill us with an overwhelming desire to share your love. Amen

Gilly Robinson, 16 May 2021