

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, "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 – for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 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." So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

John 17:6-19

Jesus prayed for his disciples, "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."

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The path to sainthood is rarely a smooth stroll. We dance, instead, toward holiness in shifting tempos and evolving melodies. God is always our lead; our role is to stay awake and attentive to the rhythm and flow.

Because the spiritual dance with God, like any other dance, consists of pauses and movements.

In dance, pauses are not breaks, they are an element of the dance. Pauses create space and allow the dancers a moment to breath, to reconnect to each other and to their environment, and to prepare for something new.

A graceful pause will draw meaning from the movement that came before it and, in return, will shine new meaning and breathe new energy into the movements that follow when the pause has finished its natural course.

Pause and movement; two complementary expressions in energetic interaction with each other; heaven and earth, not one thing, not two things, both giving and receiving within the larger wholeness of God's embrace.

In the spiritual dance, if we allow a pause to linger too long, we can stop the flow, leaving us wondering where God is. Unsure, maybe, what we are doing. Yet even when we *are* aware that we are on a path to holiness, we can also disrupt the flow by dancing out ahead of grace; by trying to lead the dance when we should be following. The risk may be all the greater when we are certain that we are on the correct path.

Like Peter and the disciples in our reading from Acts.

Now, to be fair, they are living in a newly uncharted world. Jesus has ascended to heaven. The nine days between that day and Pentecost must have seemed an eternity. Even so, the apostles and some of the disciples stayed together praying.

The apostles have been waiting together because the Risen Christ told them to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father. So they prayed and they waited, waited and prayed, and like most of us when we are waiting and not knowing what might happen next, they got into a little mischief.

Peter came up with an idea: "We need to replace Judas."

Jesus had chosen Judas because Judas was a good and trustworthy man. Along the way, something – greed, jealousy, despair – *something* turned Judas away from Jesus, leading him to become overwhelmed by guilt and wind up dead in the field he had bought with his payment for the betrayal.

Peter reminded the apostles that when Judas committed suicide, he had left an opening in the fellowship of the Twelve. Surely, Peter thought, we can't function with only eleven apostles because there were twelve tribes in Israel. Scripture said that there had to be twelve apostles to symbolize Israel in its wholeness.

Now, "apostle" is a title that means "those who are sent." And because the twelve apostles were those sent as personal representatives of Jesus, they reasonably assumed that a replacement must be an eye-witness of Jesus' ministry – a person who, as Peter said, "accompanied us during the whole time...beginning with John's baptizing until the day [Jesus] was taken up from us."

Luke's story in Acts tells us that there were 120 people in the room. In addition to the remaining eleven apostles, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there as were James and Jude, his brothers. Mary Magdalene, Salome, and several other women were probably in the room, and it seems likely that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were there. So, out of all those people, who would they choose?

That had to be one strange and nerve-wracking job interview. It was the first time that anyone but Jesus had chosen someone to bring on board and they thought they'd better find someone with previous experience, which led them to a short list of two people: Joseph, also called Bar-Sabbas, and Matthias.

Believing that he knew best, Peter insisted on maintaining orderly structure. And so, properly sober after Peter's passionate plea, the apostles and disciples prematurely interrupted their waiting – their holy pause – and got back into action. They cast lots. The lot fell to Matthias, who was then enrolled with the eleven, restoring the structure that Peter had wanted so impatiently.

Peter was certain that maintaining the symbolism of the twelve tribes of Israel was what mattered most. He was just a little out of step with what Jesus had told them to wait for in Jerusalem. And, of course, with the Risen Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter's momentary, earthly order collapsed in the charm and chaos of Pentecost.

In time, Paul would become the more obvious candidate to be named the twelfth apostle. However, shortly after Pentecost, the Romans began killing off the remaining apostles, and so the young church stopped naming further replacements for the apostles.

We never hear about St. Matthias in scripture again. He arises from relative obscurity and returns to it. And yet, even Luke's one brief mention of him offers insights into how God improvises even when the church confuses authoritative self-importance with grounded self-awareness; how God readjusts even when we put our personal needs for tradition or for structure ahead of our intimate relationship with God.

It is difficult to abide in the present moment; to stay open to God's grace and loving challenges. Moving along the path of sainthood requires practice and patient forbearance. Even so, if we stay awake, the dance of discernment keeps us *in* the Kosmos, as Jesus prayed, and yet not *belonging to* the Kosmos.

The prayer in the passage from John's Gospel that we call the "high-priestly prayer" of Jesus is intricate and layered. Praying on behalf of his followers, Jesus catches us up in a swirling mystical vision. His words spiral and eddy in phrases that flow in overlapping currents, baffling our rational minds and planting impressions like embryos.

We experience and intuit more than we comprehend as we hear of God's Word spoken joyfully in Jesus; God's inner name, "Loveltself," revealed perfectly by Jesus; God's grace poured out gloriously through Jesus.

The prayer is a love letter delivered from the lips of Jesus, yet sourced from the generative power that gives life to all God's creation. The people who receive the love letter's invitation and consent to the dance become willing partners to the presence of Christ. Together, despite our own missteps and clumsiness, God develops us into holy people – saints – not after death in some supernatural realm, but right here, alive in a world suffering from violence, fear and separation.

Jesus is not *pleading* with God in this lavish prayer. What we overhear, if we are attentive, is Jesus *revealing* God. We notice – or maybe better to say, we intuit – an almost irresistible opening to deeper realizations of God's generative love. This opening is the path of sainthood where God will sanctify us in truth by the indwelling of God's grace.

The grace is given, but there are steps to learn.

Through prayer and worship and study, we learn to coordinate our hearts, minds and souls with the Spirit of the Living God. In partnership

with God, in a community of practice, we learn to enjoin our intuition, emotions and bodily responses with our rational minds.

We learn to go within from a posture of humility, mindfully and continually putting Christ at the center so that we don't trip on our own self-importance and certainty. Discernment requires some sensitivity to God's spirit at work, a degree of self-knowledge, and some knowledge of the ways that the world around us works.

Some of us will have more noticeable roles in spreading God's light into the darkness, like St. Peter or St. John the Baptizer. Some of us will have footnote roles like St. Matthias or unheralded roles like Joseph called Bar-Sabbas.

Together, as we each dance the part given to us, those who follow Christ become the living, mystical body of Christ. In all our individuality, we interconnect and interact with the source of all being. And through that source we connect to all people, to all life, to all of God's beloved creation.

God's Word is spoken in us; God's inner name, "Loveltsel," is revealed by us; God's grace is poured out through us.

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