

**Easter 7B
Acts 1:15-17, 21-26
May 24, 2009**

So there he was. Just another face in the crowd. Just a guy. Oh sure, he'd been around for a long time. Since the beginning, actually. But he never stood out much. Never made it into the big discussions, the arguments, the late-night bull sessions. He was always just one of the guys, just part of the group.

Matthias. Who knew? Who ever thought he would end up as one of the Twelve? But there he was, plucked from the back of the crowd along with Justus to be considered to take the place of Judas Iscariot. He wasn't chosen because he was a great healer, or a great preacher, or a great leader. He wasn't chosen because he dressed right or knew the right people or had the best connections. He was chosen because he had been there, walked with Jesus from the first beginning ... when John baptized Jesus, all the way to the next beginning ... when Jesus was raised from the dead.

He and Justus were chosen only because they had walked the way, the whole way, with Jesus. And then, like some mad "American Idol" finale, the two of them stood before all the other disciples as they prayed for God's decision, for God's direction. They waited for the votes to come in. And when the lots fell Matthias's way, there was no confetti shower, no triumphant schlocky tune written especially for the occasion. No fanfare, no tour, no recording contract.

Matthias was chosen. And then Matthias disappeared from scripture as unobtrusively as he entered it. He is never mentioned again in the New Testament. There are any numbers of stories about him from the early Church Fathers. Some say he went to Ethiopia to preach the gospel to barbarians and cannibals, who crucified him. Others say Matthias stayed in Jerusalem, was later stoned and beheaded.

Others say, yes, he stayed in Jerusalem, and died there of old age. His remains supposedly lie in the German town of Trier, taken there, legend says, by Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine. Except in the castle of Gonio-Apsaros in Georgia, there are also bones that are said to be those of Matthias.

Matthias, we hardly knew ye. Who were you? What did you do with your apostleship? Where did you go? What did it mean that you followed Jesus from beginning to end? What did it mean that you were chosen to join the Twelve? How did you feel, stepping into Judas's place, stepping into Judas's shoes?

We will never know. And isn't that the way of it really? There are so many, many people in the long history of Christianity who rose to a call from God, who did the work God gave them to do, and did it with gladness and singleness of heart, but whom we will never know. For every Martin Luther, or Martin Luther King, Jr., there are a thousand Martin somebodies who followed Jesus in obscurity. For every Theresa of Avila or Mother Teresa, there are a thousand Theresa nobodies who live lives of Christian witness and who never get named in any book at all.

And yet ... and yet. When their name was called, when their lot was cast, they stepped forward. They took a risk that it was worth it, to take seriously this business of following Jesus. Sure it might get them crucified. Or they might die of old age. No one knows what might happen, if you choose to accept the call of Christ. No one ever tells you how it's all going to work out. You could be Peter and be the rock of the church. You could be Paul and get a third of the New Testament filled with your writing. Or you could be Matthias, called, chosen, and forgotten, all in just a few short verses.

In a few minutes, we will see two sorts of these faithful disciples step forward. The first set is made up of our graduating seniors. They don't know yet when their call will come, or what that call will be to, or what that call will be for. They stand on the brink of their adult lives, knowing only that God loves them and has brought them safely thus far. They have dreams and hopes for their future, but they have no certain direction yet. Like Matthias, they stand in the crowd, watching from a distance, wondering when and if their call will come.

The second set is made up of four people from this parish, and their chaplain, the Reverend Deacon Bill Fineout, from St. Paul's. They have heard a call to serve Christ as ministers of healing, in the Order of St. Luke the Physician, an ecumenical ministry of Christian healing. They have answered this call by studying and praying together for a year. They will be inducted into this order, and then what happens next, who knows? But they have heard this call in faith, and they have responded to this call in faith, and like Matthias, they are willing to step forward and see what God has in mind for them.

How will it turn out in the end, for our graduates, or for these new members of St. Luke's? No one knows but God. God who calls, God who empowers, God who commissions, God who sends forth. It is God who hold the future in the palm of a wide hand, who supports us all with a mighty, outstretched arm. Only God knows how it will all turn out.

But however it turns out in the end, it always turns out that this is the challenge, the real, true, deep and abiding challenge of Christian life. To be able to take that step forward, to be willing to answer that call. To stand, like Matthias ... or the even-more-often forgotten Justus ... when your name is called and be willing to accept what God might have in mind for you. To say yes, when that voice in your ear says "Will you?" To say, "here I am," when your community asks, "who will go for us?" To say, "I will, with God's help," when you might want to turn away and say, "I won't, thank you very much."

That is why these calls never happen in solitude or in isolation, but always in community, always in a web of support and love. Matthias stepped forward out of a crowd of 120, and he stepped forward to become one of the Twelve. He was never alone. He was always with his community. Without the community, who among us would ever have the courage to say "yes," to God's call, to step forward when our name is called, to accept the future, whatever it holds, knowing that we can trust the One who holds the future?

It is a mystery, you know, that God chooses US, uses US -- to be God's hands and feet in this world. Why would God use any of us, just ordinary regular people, living in a medium-sized Midwestern community in a state that is struggling to stay afloat? And yet, we are the very ones God wants, the very ones God calls, over and over again, making us into his Body, here at this altar, sending us out into our world, into *His* world, to be that Body. A bunch of Matthiases we are, all of us – obscure, unknown, unnoticed -- yet no less necessary for our obscurity.

There is a poem by a man named Erik Doughty about Matthias, about us. He writes:

**Matthias, patron saint of
tailors, carpenters, alcoholism, and Gary, Indiana--
well, here's the day he gets chosen
to replace Judas the betrayer
and then there's no more
about Matthias, except mystery.**

**Meanwhile we eavesdrop on your prayer, Lord,
asking protection for your loved ones,
sending them out into the world;
they must have been confused at all this.**

**Not all of us are the big names
upon which you build your church;
some of us wonder if we're more Judas than not
and others feel like Matthias, fading into
the background. Even so,
Sew us together into one great piece;
One holy, whole home
for sinners and saints alike.¹**

¹ Erik Doughty, copyright 2009.