

Acts 1

June 2, 2019

“The Full Number”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Christ Cares Sunday

Pastor Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ –

[Introduction]

In the Book of Genesis, the Lord called the twelve tribes.

You know, the twelve tribes, the sons of Jacob, the whole family of Israel,
the Lord called the twelve tribes to be his covenant people.

Biblically speaking, twelve – twelve makes a complete family,
all God’s people gathered into one communion,
the full portion of his faithful people.

That fullness – It was destroyed by the unfaithfulness of Dan,
the first of the children of Israel to turn from the Lord God (Judges 18).
And because of it..

The fellowship of God’s Israel is broken.
The twelve is now eleven: broken, incomplete.

Oh, the outward appearance of unity and completeness might be maintained,
but what is broken cannot make itself whole again.

[Question]

You ask... How shall the work of sin be undone?
How shall God’s people be made one again?

During the days that immediately followed Jesus’ ascension,
the Eleven and the other disciples, about 120 in number,
awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit by devoting themselves to prayer.

Their prayer arose out of their study together of the prophets
—who had pointed to the incarnation of Christ,
his ministry, sufferings, death, and resurrection—

Their prayer also arose out of the Psalter, the prayer book of the twelve tribes of Israel, of the whole people of God, of Christ Jesus, and of the Church in all ages.

In the course of their prayers from God’s Word,
passages from Psalms 69 and 109 came to Peter’s attention.
Here was a Word from the Lord to direct their action.

As Israel had been broken and scattered because of sin,
so, too, the apostolic circle had been broken by the sin of Judas Iscariot.
The Twelve were now only the Eleven.
The full number of the Twelve must be restored (vv 15–20).

Peter said:

“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 men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (vv 21–22 ESV).

[Question]

And you ask... Why only one witness more?
 Why not both Matthias and Barsabbas?

If this were simply a matter of adding witnesses,
certainly thirteen would be better than twelve.
Indeed, soon enough the number of those who proclaim the resurrection would swell,
as Barnabas and Paul and Apollos joined in.

At the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus chose twelve men,
the living picture of Israel made one in him and in their call to follow him faithfully.

Their unity, too, was broken by unfaithfulness by Judas Iscariot.
This time there is no possibility of maintaining the illusion of fullness.
The fellowship has been broken.

This is what sin does. It drives us away from God and away from one another.

[Question]

And you ask... Why are twelve important?
 Why is this story even a focus?

You see, the restoration of the Twelve is the very picture of our Lord’s saving work.

His death breaks the power of sin
and his resurrection proclaims healing for the broken
and reconciliation of those driven apart by sin.
Filling the place that Judas deserted and restoring the full number of the Twelve
not only brought an additional witness to the resurrection,

but it also was a witness
to the power of Christ's resurrection,
to reconcile the estranged,
to make his people, his new Israel, whole.

Israel is reduced to twelve tribes and the twelve tribes are reduced to Jesus.
In Jesus are the twelve apostles and the twelve apostles lead the full number.

You see,
GOD'S PEOPLE ARE MADE ONE BY CHRIST'S SAVING WORK.

It was important that
the man who would complete the number of the Twelve
would be like the Eleven with respect to his faithful following of Jesus
and
would be a witness to all Jesus said and did in the days of his incarnation.

As with the Eleven, he would have followed the Lord,
not by chance,
not by his own decision, and
not by his act of commitment,
but by the call of his Lord.

It was only two disciples that met these qualifications:
☐ Joseph, also known as Barsabbas and by the Latin name "Justus," and
☐ Matthias.

We know almost nothing about them; they really are strangers to us.
What is important about them *BOTH* is that Jesus called them,
and they faithfully followed Jesus.

"Then they cast lots" (v 26).

And you ask... Why is there no report of background checks,
panel interviews,
and a thorough discussion?

The simple answer is that the assembly is not making the selection.
Neither the will of man nor good luck nor blind fate will determine.
The choice is not in the hands of men,
even men who have called upon God to assist them.

As with the Eleven, the Lord choose –
the Lord would choose one to complete the number of the Twelve.
The whole matter is out of their hands. God's choice is Matthias.

[*Question*]

And you ask... Why does this matter to me?
What does this mean to me?

The number of the Twelve is restored.
This is the fruit of the saving death and resurrection of our Lord.
Israel is made whole in Christ.

We are told no more about Matthias.
Instead, all our attention is directed to the apostolic witness of Christ
and the power of his resurrection.

This Good News is proclaimed for nations and peoples
as the Twelve, the evangelists, apostles, and apostolic ministers
in every age go into all the world.

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John says:
*"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could
count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne
and before the Lamb."* (Revelations 7:9)

He had just said that there was 144,000 sealed.
And then Revelation 14 promises:
144,000 who had Jesus' name and his Father's name
written on their foreheads.
144,000 Or $12 \times 12,000$... in other words, the full number.

You are part of the full number.
You are part of the twelve.
You are part of Jesus Christ. So go and... make disciples of all nations.
Invite all to Baptism that incorporates us into Christ
and makes us members of his body.
Invite all to receive the refreshing forgiveness
Invite all to be witnesses to the resurrection.
You are the full number! Amen!

REJOICE always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. AMEN! (1 Thess. 5:16–18)
