



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Seventh Sunday of Easter – May 13, 2018, Thank you Justus!

In this morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples have to find someone to replace Judas, and to keep their leadership at the number of twelve, faithfully representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel. And so, they cast lots.

Every time this story comes up in the Lectionary, the more sinister side of me sits back and asks, "What if we elected our bishops this way?" Then I laugh it off and move on with whatever I'm doing.

But this morning as I sit with that question, I think that disguised behind that humor is a more important question and that question is, "How do we invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit into our discernment not only of leadership, but also of mission and ministry?"

I've done two terms on the Commission on Ministry and one term on the Standing Committee, including a year as the Standing Committee President. And when I served on these bodies, we had a lot of candidates for ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood come before us. And one of the things that I would always ask that we do after the deliberation and the question-asking and the debating and all that stuff was that we sit in silence and ask God to show us on which side of the altar we saw each candidate standing and serving. Was it in front of the altar? Or was it behind? God calls God's people to both sides, after all. And then I asked that we share what we got in that time of spiritual and visual listening, because I wanted to make sure that the process was more spiritual than it was political. The amazing thing about all of that is, every time we did that, the answer was unanimous.

There you go.

It's got to be spiritual process.

And the casting of lots to determine whether it would be Justus or Mathias who would take the place of Judas was also spiritual process. They didn't just cast lots and go with that. Before they cast the lots, they asked God to show them through the casting of the lots whom God had chosen. They invoked the presence of the Holy Spirit, and you and I are called to do the same as we face the crossroads and decision-making challenges of our lives

It's all about discerning call – who God is calling and what God is calling us to do.

You know, I've lost more than one church election in my lifetime and while that has the potential to be a painful thing, the real question is "Was I called to hold that office, or was I called to be part of the process?" In the words of a very sage friend of mine, "Sometimes we have to offer ourselves up so that people can make choices that they wouldn't otherwise be able to make."

And that's what both Justus and Mathias did – and they undoubtedly listened to the Holy Spirit as well. It's interesting to note that we hear nothing about either of these men after this story. What became of them? What did each of them do for the mission and ministry of the burgeoning church?

Seventh Sunday of Easter – May 13, 2018, cont'd.

And did one of them quit and one of them stay the course, or did both of them stay the course, even though one of them lost? Justus lost the toss of the dice, but we have no indication that he lost his faith.

Another question is, “Do we even need to be remembered in order to effectively engage our mission and ministry?”

Who are the people who are now no longer with us who made a profound spiritual effect on your lives, your spiritual lives? Why did they do what they did to serve as your guides? And now that they're gone, what will the memory of them be in 50 years? For most of these people, it will probably be very little. It's the same for Justus and Mathias. And let's face it, it will probably be the same for most of the people in this Cathedral this morning. But that doesn't mean we aren't going to be disciples, does it?

We're not called to do what we do for our own self-aggrandizement. We're called to do what we do for the sake of the God we love, and then to collectively blend our ministry together to create a greater good and expand the presence of Christ to a desperate and needy world who longs for that presence, whether they know it or not.

And when we look at it that way, you know what? We're all winners; not winners and losers, but just winners. There is no way we can do anything but win if we simply turn to and focus our attention on God.

It reminds me of one of my grace-filled sessions out in Kailua with my spiritual director when after we sat in silence she said, “Where would you like to begin?” and I looked at her and said, “I want to go to the shore of Galilee, to that resurrected Jesus who stood there by the charcoal fire and beckoned the Peter who denied him to his side so that he could forgive him and send him forth to build the church.” And then I added, “I want to be with Peter beside the resurrected Lord.” And when my spiritual director asked me why I wanted to begin our session there, I replied, “Because nothing else matters.”

Did Justus care whether he won or lost? We'll never know. But we can know what the answer is for ourselves. I'd like to think that all that mattered to him was that he knew the resurrected Lord like I long to know the resurrected Lord. Because in the end, nothing else matters. And when we look at our ministry from that place, all the stuff that we get worked up about – are the tables set up for coffee hour, did someone brew the coffee and steep the tea, are there any mistakes in the bulletins, are the linens the right color, is it OK for this person to be in charge versus this person, do we have the right priest, do we have the right bishop, is this building going to fall down, are we going to have enough money, are we focused on the right things – all those things seem to dwindle away because we are overpowered instead by the presence of the risen Lord, just like Justus was overpowered by the presence of the risen Lord.

And so this morning, this Eucharist can be for him, because of his willingness to offer himself up and risk losing so that the disciples could make a choice. May we be so faithful, may we be so courageous, may we be so bold. And may we be thankful, thankful for Justus, thankful for Mathias, thankful for the Holy Spirit, and thankful for the presence of the risen Lord!

Amen.