

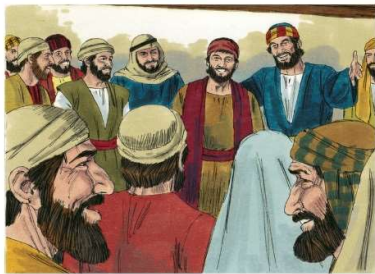
St Edmunds and Zoom - 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Acts 1:15-17, John 17:6-19

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.



Well, what a year that was, and still is! My father may have experienced the Second World War as a young adult, but we have experienced something so different, hopefully a once in a generation event, a pandemic which is not over yet. I cannot begin to think of a similar event that has affected our daily life so much, and still does so. From the minute we wake up to when we go to sleep, all of our plans for the days have been affected in big or small ways. And so it continues. What will our memories be? The smell of hand sanitizer? The sound of advice on the radio? The challenge of thinking what to do when we cannot leave our homes? Some of us will have tougher memories, especially if we know what have been called key workers – those who distributed food or tried to help those who were ill. I suppose that it proved that I could survive with only my beloved husband and cat for company, and a few thousand books of course...



When the apostle Peter stood up to speak as recorded in our first reading today, he was also coming to terms with events that had changed his life, and the lives of those around him in a totally different way. Look at that first sentence, that the believers numbered about one hundred and twenty people. That's quite an increase in a matter of days from the twelve followers who had

sat round a table for a Passover meal, even if you add in all the women who actually stayed around for the crucifixion.

Peter is being practical. From those twelve men one is missing, Judas “who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus”, but who “was allotted his share of the ministry”. Some sources suggest that he was the sort of treasurer of the group surrounding Jesus, and that his comments at the time of the woman anointing Jesus with the expensive ointment reflect that. It is probable that he was amongst the twelve that were sent out to minister to the villages, and is mentioned in the names of the twelve disciples. In the gospel reading for today he is called “the one destined to be lost so that the scripture may be fulfilled”, so we know that he was remembered.

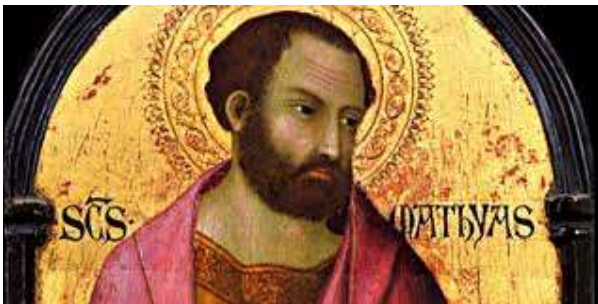


*Ian McShane in “Jesus of Nazareth”*

There have been lots of theories about Judas, ranging from his identification as Iscariot, through to how much he was predestined to take action that night. It’s a confusion of sources, just as news and comment is today. We have experienced how the presentation of news can vary over the last few months. While some of us have sought out the slightest crumb of comfort from the harsh figures presented on our screens, others have just very sensibly not watched the news programmes. Some of us have waited until the welcome news of the vaccination programme has been everywhere, giving hope in a dark world. Even if we didn’t get a sticker we know that we have been given a gift, a promise, a miracle of science in a way. We can be grateful to the women and men who have devoted so much time and energy to developing this enormous source of hope, and all those delivering the breakthrough vaccine. We need to help it be provided for everyone in this country, as well as those who so desperately need it across the world.



As always there are inequalities, unfairness and it is up to us to make a difference. As we reach the end of Christian Aid week today we can rejoice in what has been given, the change it will make in lives, and promise to keep the impetus going.



I said earlier that Peter was being practical in his suggestion that they needed another person to replace Judas, and it is good that they had a choice of two people. I'm not sure of the exact format of how they drew lots, but I suppose it meant that the choice was not a popularity contest, or a test of those who shouted loudest, but a chance for God's will to be known in a certain way. I'm told that Matthias went on to do great things. I hope that the multi named Joseph – Barsabbas – Justus found a role that suited his abilities; there was probably a good chance of it as the overall effect of the work of the first followers of the risen Jesus were by any account impressive.



*Triptych with the Annunciation, Robert Campin*

It made me think of the ways that God has made his will known. In the Old Testament he wasn't slow to speak through burning bushes, send rules on

stones, and even cause disasters in order to get his message across, or at least the writers of the various books thought. In the New Testament Mary was visited by an angel who imparted news, as angels were to tell others of Jesus' birth. Then God's messages, God's will, was spoken by Jesus, even if it was not always clear at the time. At his ascension he promised that the Holy Spirit would convey God's will to those who believed.

It's quite a leap to understand how that is supposed to work. Some people are convinced that they know what the Holy Spirit is saying to them, at least at certain significant points in their lives. Perhaps we have felt the will of God in our lives as a message, a calling, a comfort at times. Some bigger groups like churches have felt that they are the messengers of God, that what is preached, said and done by their leaders is the truth. That's quite a responsibility.



We have all received a lot of messages over the last year and a half. Warnings, rules, even laws covering our daily life and activities. They have been delivered in so many ways, from the debatable announcements from a media centre, through to television announcements, newspaper pieces and the wealth of information and misinformation available online. One of the gifts we have had, I believe, is the number of ways we have had to keep in touch, zooming or messaging.



My favourite has been the What's app video links, enabling me to see what my off spring have been up to, from ill advised hair cuts to dubious home improvements, the antics of cats and a dog, as well as checking their basic well being. Mind you, the things that the system got called a couple of days ago when it stopped working, do not bare repeating in our

house at least. I think that most of us have been grateful for so many communication possibilities, though of course nothing replaces the actual presence of our loved ones.



So it has been a special time, a time of challenges, some fear and isolation which has not finished yet. Those people who were present for the drawing of lots, who heard Jesus' prayer to his father had been scared, felt that they were a small number to spread the message of God through Jesus, and yet they were to speak and act with such conviction that they changed the world for centuries to come. Let us pray that we can make an effort to change a bit of our world for the better in whatever way we can form the background of challenges and even loss, and that the Holy Spirit can carry on working through us.

Julie Barham, 14 May 2021