



Pastor Ken's Sermon

SERMON – 7TH EASTER

ACTS 1:12-26

MAY 16, 2021

“THE CHURCH IS CALLING”

Today I want to talk about aspirations (goals, that sort of thing). Let this be fun...don't overload your brain too much! If you are young, in school or just about out of it, what would you like to do? When I was a kid a teacher might have asked *“what do you want to be when you grow up?”* If you are in your “middle years” – not too old, no longer young, and you could “pivot” right now, or soon, what would you “pivot to” even if you don't think you have the skills to do it, nor the time to acquire them...entertain yourself with the thought. Finally, to you who are no longer young – for whom age has largely replaced dreams with memories and perhaps a regret or two – what would you have done if you could do it over again? (Or what community ed classes are you taking this summer!)

We don't know what the aspirations of the first followers of Jesus were. In his 70's “rock opera” *“Jesus Christ Superstar”*, Andrew Lloyd Webber included a song, sung by Jesus' disciples the night of the Last Supper, in which they were being a little reflective. Maybe they were sensing things were about to change, so they sang *“always hoped that I'd be an apostle, knew that I could make it if I tried, then when we retire, we can write the gospels so they'll still talk about us when we've died.”*

Implied in Mr. Webber's conception of an “apostle” was a quiet retirement – which we can all but dismiss as completely off the mark. We don't know what the disciples thought when Jesus in Acts 1:4 said, *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.”* Nor what they thought when, in Acts 1:8 Jesus said, *“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”*. On the surface it sounds like a lot of travel and preaching, and not much time for writing.

Nor is it clear just what Jesus envisioned when he said these things. Would his followers wait...they who didn't exactly have a good track record of obeying their teacher? And when the time came would they go? Acts 1:8 contains no timetable and no strategy other than follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit and do what Jesus commissioned them to do - baptize and teach.

In our story today, the selecting of an apostle to replace the disgraced and deceased Judas is described. Some say the fellas were a little hasty in selecting Matthias – they clearly didn't wait for the “gift” of the Holy Spirit. But the decision to replace Judas did come after the boys consulted the Bible – for them the Old Testament.

Any “aspirations” the church and its followers have must be formed by Scripture – the chief tool of the Holy Spirit. Christians are “a people of the Book” – what and why we do things and even how should be formed by what the Bible says. One wonders if the Apostles had any conception they would end up in places like Antioch, Lystra, Philippi, Miletus, Ephesus, Athens, Troas, Corinth, places they had likely never heard of, or above all Rome, which every one of them knew about.

The notion of going there with the Gospel must have seemed far-fetched if not well-nigh impossible! It would have been dangerous just getting there – imagine preaching as Lord one of Rome’s crucified criminals! Yet that is precisely what Acts 28:31 says – “boldly and without hindrance (Paul) preached the kingdom of God...in Rome!

As we conclude our series on the church from the Book of Acts we read a story that tells us the church does something peculiar – it “calls” people. As a “*called and ordained minister of the church of Christ*” I’m familiar with this – and I take no little solace from the fact that if an Apostle could be called by way of casting lots (the ancient equivalent of flipping a coin) then maybe the Holy Spirit was in my call too! When I was called nearly 22 years ago, I can’t tell you I had any specific aspirations for the ministry other than to not mess it up! I knew what I was supposed to do – preach, teach and baptize, but the how to’s were anything but fully formed – and I guarantee you I had never heard any of the places I have called my ministry home!

If I had to “do it over again” I absolutely would – even if, with that hypothetical “pivot” I spoke of earlier I’d run to the chance of being a baseball play by play announcer! The joys of ministry have far outstripped its hardships/disappointments, most of which were probably self-inflicted. Acts 17:6 says that the disciples of Jesus were accused of “turning the world upside down”, and that made them about as welcome in places like Ephesus as, oh, a pandemic! So once again, what is the church? We are I suppose people who go into the world and “turn it upside down.” Because we have no King but Jesus and no aspirations but that “his kingdom come”.

We worship, even when the liturgy seems perfunctory, the sermon bland or the songs not our preferred style or in our key, simply because that is the foremost act of the church and it’s Christians – the praise of our Savior Jesus. We give our money away in the name of and for the cause of Jesus. We teach our children the truth and confess it ourselves lest we forget or get lax about it. We pray for one another but (at least we ought) even more earnestly for the lost – those who know Jesus not. We speak up for the poor, challenge government and campus secularists, tend the creation because we’re creatures ourselves, and as the beloved community hold one another accountable with a code of conduct hopefully as rigorous as the Boy Scouts.

And we bring Jesus whenever and however possible to those people who hear his voice not – by lack of faith or lack of interest it makes no matter – we tell them what we’ve been told. There is no sin beyond forgiveness, no anxiousness beyond Christ’s peace, no spiritual or emotional hole that the love of God cannot lift someone out of. And we tell them that while today is the best day for them to know and accept that message, Jesus through His church will be there with that same message tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. Our Lord if you recall, didn’t give his Great Commission a timetable. So...what are your life’s aspirations - always hoped that you’d be an apostle? Dear Christian, if you but tend to those sorts of things... you are, and you are because you have been called. AMEN