

SERMON: "WHATEVER BECAME OF...?"

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 1:21-26

DATE: MAY 17, 2015

Acts 1:21-26 (NIV)

²¹ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, ²² beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

I can be a very backward looking person---and I quite like it!

You see I love nostalgia. I'm very good at the entertainment category in the original version of Trivial Pursuit. I have a real fondness for the TV shows and music I grew up with.

I remember years ago devouring a book series called "Whatever Became Of...?" It had about 8 or 9 volumes talking about celebrities of the past and where they were now---or, at least, then.

I was always looking to see what had happened to Richard Greene, who for me will always be THE Robin Hood and Jimmie Rodgers, the singer who disappeared from sight after an accident in the late 60's.

Now, of course, with the internet you can have a nostalgia feast looking up this person and that person, this show or song or that.

It's really quite amazing how people can occupy centre stage for a while and then be gone. The one hit wonders of the world.

In truth, though, just because we don't see them doesn't mean that they aren't being seen somewhere in the world. God certainly never has to ask whatever became of them.

Our scripture lesson has that element of "Whatever Became Of?" in it.

As the Book of Acts begins we are between the Ascension of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The twelve disciples were now down to eleven because of the suicide of Judas. Jesus had called twelve special followers. Twelve was a very important and symbolic number in the Jewish tradition.

So Judas had to be replaced. The disciples wanted someone who had been with them from the beginning. Someone who knew the Lord the way they knew Him. Someone who had experienced what the original twelve had experienced. It came down to two men, Barsabbas and Matthias. Ultimately Matthias was chosen.

Just think of the honour and responsibility that fell to Matthias. To be one of the twelve. To be a leader---an example. To be one who would take the Gospel wherever he was led. To be the one who replaced the betrayer. To be the one who made the group whole again.

How very special that moment must have been for Matthias. What dreams he must have had.

But, after our lesson, we never hear from him again. Matthias is chosen at the end of Acts Chapter 1 and at Acts Chapter 2 he disappears from our sight---never to be seen or heard of again, as far as we're concerned.

Whatever became of Matthias?

No one knows. We really haven't a clue. But, then, we don't hear about the majority of the other disciples either.

The Scriptural story tells us about Peter, James, John and even Paul but few of the other disciples ever come to centre stage. Indeed, most of them don't appear on stage at all. We have some traditions referring to the ministries of some of them but very little hard evidence. And nothing solid at all about Matthias.

However, being out of the limelight doesn't mean that one no longer exists. Those who had been called by the Lord and had followed Jesus for so long all had places of ministry.

I'm sure that Matthias was an effective leader in the early Church.
I'm sure he did what he was called to do.

I'm sure he was a success in continuing to obey the call of God and make a difference in the part of the world he travelled.

I'm sure he succeeded in doing what God wanted him to do---the way God wanted him to do it.

After all---what is success?

What makes someone in the pulpit or the pew successful?

Often times our society links success with fame. If someone is well known, then, they must be successful. If someone has notoriety,

then, they must be special. If someone is a celebrity, then, they must be good at what they do.

Erma Bombeck burst that balloon a number of years ago when she addressed a Commencement Ceremony at Meredith College in North Carolina.

Erma offered this wise counsel:

"Don't confuse fame with success. Madonna is fame; Helen Keller is success."

Fame can be such a fleeting thing. Society is very fickle. A person's fame can wear thin very quickly.

Newspapers are printed on paper for a reason. They are easily recycled so that the next, new, fresh headline can be declared. Today's news grows stale every 24 hours.

Strangely, there is something in our society that seems to draw people to what Andy Warhol described as their "fifteen minutes of fame".

Why else would someone want to be locked up in a house with several other people and be watched by the Big Brother audience on TV?

Why else share the grotesque details of their lives on some sleazy talk show or on Twitter?

Why else let a camera crew come along with you on a blind date so the world can see how you get along?

Reality show celebrities, for some reason, are considered important in our rather twisted world.

Fame, or infamy---whatever form of notoriety---seems to be what a number of people strive for. It seems to be what even more people want to watch and somehow relate to. To be known, for whatever reason, has somehow become equated with success.

Mother Theresa, who became famous, and was thus seen as successful and worth talking to, was once asked, "How do you measure the success of your work?"

She looked puzzled for a moment and then replied, "I don't remember that the Lord ever spoke of success. He spoke only of faithfulness in Love. This is the only success that counts."

Faithfulness in love.

That's what I like to think of when I think of Matthias.

Faithfulness in love usually doesn't bring fame. It certainly can bring a wondrous success.

As the Gospels and Epistles were written I doubt very much if Matthias was too concerned about not being mentioned again. I suspect he was too busy being faithful in love.

The value of our ministry should really have nothing to do with how many people know about us.

For clergy, it isn't about the biggest Church or the most influential pulpit.

For the laity, it isn't about having to make sure our names are always connected with our deeds.

The value of our discipleship comes from hearing and obeying God's call to service.

It has to do with following along our own individual faith journey with all its twists and turns and ups and downs.

It has to do with how we face disappointment and how we struggle against things that attack our integrity.

It has to do with how we react when things are going very well. Does everyone have to know?

It has to do with how we respond to the needs of those God brings into our lives.

The vast majority of us will never be known outside our family, friends and workplace. Our society will never ask, "Whatever became of us?"

That doesn't mean we haven't been around.

It doesn't mean we never existed.

It doesn't mean our lives are unsuccessful.

It doesn't mean our ministries are unvalued.

It simply means we have done God's work out of the limelight.

Fame, recognition, reward, worldly success---these are the things that can very easily seep into our thoughts in the midst of whatever we do. They bring the focus of others upon us. But so long as we know what became of us and God knows what became of us that's all that really matters.

A child came home from school with tears in her eyes. Her mother asked what was wrong. The little girl said that she had been given only a small part in the school play and she had wanted a starring role. Her mother sat the child on her knee and took off her watch.

"What do you see?" the mother asked.

"A gold case, a face and two hands," the girl replied.

Opening the back of the watch the mother repeated her question.

"I see many tiny wheels," the girl said.

"This watch would be useless," her mother said, "without every part---even the ones you can hardly see."

The little girl stopped crying.

There are more parts that make things work, that go unseen, than are front and centre---in a watch and in a play and in a Church and in a society.

Matthias and all the other "silent" disciples experienced that.

Whatever became of Matthias?

God knows and that's all that really matters.

(1443)