

The Twelve Apostles

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture for today comes from Acts chapter 1, verses 12 to 26. Please follow along on the bulletin and your own Bibles on the screen.!

In those days, Peter stood up among the brothers.

The company of persons was in all about 120 and said, Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness. And falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language, a kaldema, that is, a field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, 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.

[2 : 1 3] And they put forward two, Joseph, called Basabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.

And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. This is the word of God. Sorry, guys, I should have done this before.

I didn't know it was so high. Cool. But, yeah, let's keep that passage open, and let's look at it together.

If you don't know me, my name is Niels. Yeah, one of the leaders here. It's my privilege to be preaching God's word together. But if we want God to speak to us, we need to pray.

So let's pray. Paul wrote, To him who is able to strengthen you through my gospel. Father, thank you for the gospel.

[3 : 4 0] Thank you for your word of salvation. Thank you that it strengthens us, it keeps us going, it speaks to our hearts. Please, would you do that today? By your spirit to each of us here, would you speak deeply and make us hear what each of us needs to hear.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Great. So, now, Hong Kong, as you probably know, it's a very, very rushed city.

Everything has to be done so quickly. You probably know that at work, right? Deadline after deadline. It's all so quick. Sometimes even here at church, right? Summer is coming, and then the next academic year, so we need to prepare things.

The venue is coming on very quickly. Maybe, you know, if you're trying to park here, you feel like it's taking ages. But the design team will realize, they think, well, July is really, really soon.

Everything is so quick. And then you compare that with some other things that just seem to take ages, right? The MTR says, yeah, we're going to build this new line that will be done in 2033.

[4 : 44] And you just feel that this ages away, right? Some things are taking so long. And yet, as I've been reflecting, 2033 is nothing.

It's only eight years away. I recently had a birthday, and that's like one year away from a bigger one next year. And I realized, yeah, I'm getting old.

I'm no longer young, especially as a Christian, right? So I became a Christian as an adult, 25 or so. I feel like, wow, I became a Christian quite late in life.

I'm only just going. And then I realized I've been a Christian for 24 years. All right? So 24 years of reading the Bible. It's longer than some of you have been alive.

24 years of, you know, fighting sin and sometimes good days, sometimes bad days. 24 years of denying yourself for the good of others. That's the Christian life.

[5 : 40] And I'm not even halfway. I've got another 30 years to go or more, right? That's a really, really long time. Maybe on some of the people here with gray hair, you know, some people who are in their 80s.

That is the Christian life, actually, right? We don't only the Christian life. It actually is the Christian life that you're committed to Jesus for your whole life.

And that is long. And there are great moments of joy and meaning and peace. But there are also a lot of moments of discipline, of keeping going, of putting up with things, of doing that.

Now, why would you do something like that, right? If you're getting baptized next week, you've just become a Christian. Maybe it's great to be a Christian. Christian, but the hard things, they will be there for another 60 years.

That's a long time. How do we keep going? You know, how do we stay faithful as Christians? How do we, well, a multi-generational Christian, not just people who keep going for a bit, but make it to the end.

[6 : 46] Well, we need to know that God is faithful, right? We want to make sure that the thing we're trusting in, you know, I've given my life to Jesus, that that's really worth it.

That is really something that will happen, that will keep going. Something that we can rely on, that Jesus is someone we can rely on. That is the thing that keeps us going. And I think that is where this passage wants to go.

And that is how I think God wants to encourage us this morning. And that we will keep going with Jesus our whole life and not just a few moments. Now, you probably wonder, what does it have to do with this passage?

which is a bit of an unexpected passage, but especially if you are, you know, you were here last week. This is, we're doing the book of Acts, which is kind of the, the history of the early church, of what Jesus, you know, continued to do after he went to heaven.

And last week was really exciting, right? Jesus, you know, risen, he ascended to heaven and gave the disciples a job to do. And he said, wait for the spirit. And in chapter two, the spirit comes, but we get kind of this interruption of this passage here, right?

[7 : 53] In a way, they, they were doing what they should do. They were waiting. I mean, if you've read the gospels, you know that the disciples didn't always do what Jesus wanted, but here they do. Verse 12, right?

They returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet. When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying. Verse 14, all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Great, right? Praying with one accord. Last Thursday, we had our church prayer meeting over 40 people. It was such a great time of together, crying out to God, right? It was wonderful.

I know many of you couldn't be there, but such a great moment. And yet, we are waiting for the spirit, but we get this long story in between of, yeah, that seems a bit irrelevant, right?

It's a bit like HR. There's this vacancy to fill. Well, this is narrative, right? Luke doesn't really say, this is what I want you to know. He tells a story and he wants us to think about it and feel its significance.

[9 : 01] And I think that's what we're going to do. The aircon is strong today. But, yeah, I just had a few simple question words, right?

What? Why? Who? And then, so what? So, let's think about the what first. What is happening here? Well, as you read the story, it is ultimately about replacing Judas, right?

In a way, that's a, you know, you look at the start and at the end, what has happened in the story. Well, Judas is replaced. I guess, if you're new to Christianity, you probably know the name Judas. That is not very popular.

Why? Because it's, as a baby name or something, because it's the guy who betrayed Jesus, right? Who was one of his chosen followers but betrayed him. And, well, Peter, kind of the, one of the, yeah, the, one of the most vocal apostles, he stands up, verse 15.

In those days, Peter stood up among the brothers. The company of persons was in all about 120 and said, brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a god to those who arrested Jesus.

[10 : 19] For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. And there was Judas, he was one of us, but he became a traitor. And he is now gone, right?

That's what we, Luke fills that in. He talks about what happened to Judas. You heard it in the reading. Right? How he fell over and all his bowels gushed out. It's pretty gruesome. And that field became a field, yeah, known as the field of blood.

But it's not a surprise. Peter says, actually, the scripture had to be fulfilled. Right? This is, this was all what, yeah, what it said in scripture. So he quotes a few psalms, a few psalms of David.

David, the ancestor of Jesus, kind of predicting the pattern of what Jesus would go through, that he would be betrayed. But then, yeah, the betrayer, verse 20, for it is written in the book of Psalms, may his camp become desolate.

Let there be no one to dwell in it. Right? That field of blood where no one lived anymore, that came to pass. But then also, verse 20, let another take his office.

[11 : 27] He needs to be replaced. And so, guys, we need to find someone, someone who's been with us from John's baptism to the resurrection to take his place. And so, that's what they do.

They deliberate, they look for people, they come up with two candidates, they pray, they cast a lot, and Matthias is chosen. So, that's what we have here. We have a new apostle, Matthias.

But why is this story here? Is it just to tell us how to choose a new leader? Right? That if we want more elders, okay, this is how we should go about it. Or maybe, when they needed a new pope last week, instead of the voting and the white smoke, they should have just followed this.

Well, no. What is this? I think, I hope you notice, that the idea is to make, again, 12 apostles. Right?

It's not really about Matthias, it's about having 12 apostles. Right? Because, Matthias, verse 26, was numbered with the 11 apostles. And, even in the beginning, in verse 13, now they all went to the upper room, and then we get a whole list.

[12 : 31] Right? In verse 13, Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, and Thomas, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and the other James, and the other Simon, and the other Judas. Why all these names?

Why are they so important? Well, they are 11, and now we have 12. And, it's not really about these guys. Apart from Peter, James, and John, none of them get mentioned.

Right? You think, okay, Matthias is going to be important. He's not really mentioned in the rest of Acts. We get Philip, and Stephen, and a lot about Paul. No, it's not about these guys in particular.

It's about these 12, these 12 apostles. And, why are they important? Well, they are 12 apostles to Israel. They are 12 apostles to Israel.

Because, if you've read your Bible, you probably know that the number 12 is very significant. 12 is the number of the 12 tribes of God's people in the Old Testament.

[13 : 32] We read the whole Bible last year. There were the whole, all the narrative books in the Bible reading plan. Many of you have read it. We did a Bible overview last year. Well, God chose this people, right?

He chose Abraham and his family. And that family, well, came out of, yeah, a family of 12 sons, the 12 tribes. And, God loved them, and he rescued them from Egypt, and he gave them the promised land, and he made them his own, and he looked after them.

But, of course, they, they sinned, and they rejected God, and they worshipped idols. And, after hundreds of years, well, ultimately, God had to judge them, and he sent them into exile.

He sent them away from the promised land, and they were, well, they lost everything, but they were lost. They were just now scattered across the world. The 12 tribes were gone. But, God always promised, I will bring you back.

Yes, I've judged you, but I love you. He's the God of steadfast love, of covenant commitment. He was going to bring them back. He would gather them from the nations, all the tribes, all the people.

[14 : 39] They would come back, and he would restore the kingdom of Israel. That's what he would do. And so, that runs through all the gospels. Right, last Christmas, we looked at Luke chapter 1, and a lot of it was less to do with the particular things about Jesus' birth, but, you know, the promises to Israel, right?

Mary sings and praises God, and she says, you know, he's helped his servant Israel, just as he, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

Later, later, they go to the temple. We read it on Good Friday. There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

They were all waiting for God to fulfill that promise. Well, even last week, the disciples asked, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Well, Jesus was a bit evasive, but it's the right question, because God had promised this.

Well, that is the restoration. And the thing is, the 12 apostles are part of that. Part of the restoration is these 12 apostles.

[15 : 52] Jesus said these guys would have a big role. Here in Luke, chapter 22, at the Last Supper, what did Jesus say? He told the disciples, you know, you are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assigned to you, as my father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

They were going to be Jesus' representatives, 12 representatives for 12 tribes. They were going to announce the gospel to the 12 tribes. And, yeah, at the end, they would be there to judge the 12 tribes, on how they responded to Jesus, right?

The 12 thrones, with 12 apostles, for 12 tribes. And so, you kind of, you need 12, right? This is part of God's promise. God promised, yeah, to restore Israel, through these 12 guys.

And, can you imagine if one of them wasn't there? One of the tribes, didn't get the message. Because there were only 11. Or, at the end, there's 12 thrones, but one of them is empty.

Because Judas is in the other place. And it couldn't be, right? You need a 12 apostle. Because this is part of God's salvation plan. Now, just to say that was only back then, in a way, right?

[17 : 18] It was there at the start, at Pentecost, when the Spirit came, the start of the church. It doesn't mean it still continues now. You know, in chapter 12, one of them gets killed. He doesn't get replaced.

Because, you know, this thing has been done. The symbolic action has happened. Some churches these days say they're still apostles. apostles, but not in the way you have apostles here, right?

Especially, well, they say they need to have seen Jesus from the time of John the Baptist until the resurrection. There's not many people around today who fit that criteria. But, yeah, at that time, they needed 12 apostles because they were going to, God was going to restore Israel.

And that's why they were important. So, you can see that this is not just about, yeah, replacing Judas. This is about God's salvation plan.

The 12 apostles. And, and who is doing this? I think you can easily think that, hey, this is Peter, right? Okay, guys, hey, one of us turned aside, but I've got a plan.

[18 : 22] Hey, let's help God out and do this. Of course, this is not God. This is not Peter doing it, right? Who is fulfilling this? Well, did you notice the emphasis on fulfilling scripture?

This is all predicted, all that came to pass. Verse 16, brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled. Judas' betrayal that was fulfilled, and that was not done by Peter and the guys, right?

Judas' gruesome ends. That was predicted. That came to pass, but that wasn't Peter and the guys. That was, well, that was God doing it, right? And so, here as well, this 12 apostle, they are very aware, okay, this is God doing it.

That's why, at the end, they, they pray, right? The scripture is a promise. Fulfilling scripture is fulfilling a promise. That is God fulfilling his promises.

And so, yeah, they pray, verse 24, with these two guys, you Lord, you Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen.

[19 : 24] And they don't say, okay, God, you need another apostle. We have these guys. Uh, why don't you choose? No, Lord, you have already chosen. We know that. And we just want you to reveal your will to us.

Which of the two? They're so aware. This is God doing it. It's interesting. Actually, I say God, but who is doing it? I mean, who do the disciples call Lord? Well, it's Jesus actually, right?

Jesus is the Lord. I mean, who chose the other apostles? That was Jesus when he was here on earth. So who should choose the 12th one? It's not that suddenly the father chooses it. It's, they're actually praying to Jesus.

Jesus, will you fulfill your promise? Will you get his 12th apostle? which is quite something, right? Seven weeks after they had dinner with Jesus, uh, before his death, uh, they're now praying to Jesus in heaven.

He's at the control center of the universe. Uh, yeah. But what does that show? What does it show that God is providing a 12th apostle, right?

[20 : 29] That God is putting things in place for the restoration of Israel. It was so, that he is so faithful, right? And he made these promises thousands of years ago, and he fulfills them.

He loves his people despite their sin, despite their failure, despite their idolatry. He promised he would rescue them, all of them. And so he's doing that. He's getting what is needed.

He's putting it in place. He's going to do it, not just sending Jesus to die and pay for our sins. Yes, that's the heart of it. And yet people need to hear. And so we get the 12 representatives who were sent to the 12 tribes, right?

Jesus is putting it all in place. He is faithful. He's unchanging. Like Celine said, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Jesus, he died on the cross.

He's not going to leave it at that. He's now putting everything else in place as well for the salvation that he promised. And of course, it's not just Israel. The focus is here on Israel.

[21 : 34] Of course, they had kind of priority in terms of God's plan, but it's not just Israel, right? God promised also to save the rest of the world. Chapter nine onwards, big focus on the Gentiles.

And these 12 fade from view and you get Paul, who is the apostle to the Gentiles, Jesus representative to the Gentiles. So if you're here, you're not a Christian, don't just think, yeah, but I'm not Jewish.

What does it have to do with me? You know, this is just part of a bigger plan, but a bigger plan. Every part needs to work. And you see here this, and Jesus did everything to save them.

He will do everything to save you. You can come to him. You can come like Damien has done, like Celine has done, come to him and find salvation. He'll forgive you.

You can give your life to him. And that is actually what we're talking about. I'm not giving your life. He will do that. Because the question is, so what? If Jesus is so faithful, what should we do with that?

[22 : 40] Well, I guess we should trust him, right? If we see this, and we see how Jesus is doing this, well, we should trust him. I mean, X was written to this guy, Theophilus.

How would he feel when he reads this? When he reads, and he thinks about Jesus fulfilling his promises? Well, I can have a deep, kind of a deep trust in him, right?

Jesus is so faithful. He will do this. He, and this new faith that he's committed to, this new religion that has just shown up, it's real. It's reliable.

Even when life is not easy, even when sin pops up and again, even when things get hotter for Christians in the Roman Empire, even when life is just tiring.

Life may be like that, but Jesus is faithful. He will make the salvation happen. He will make his plan happen. You can see him put everything in place.

[23 : 41] In a way, it's even happening now, right? Jesus faithfulness is not just something in the future. It's not something static. Acts is about that salvation coming into the world and spreading.

And Theophilus, you're, you're part of that. You're part of faithful Jesus bringing this salvation to pass. And that's something that you can see in your life, something you can see around you in church, in the world.

And you're part of that. You can be part of it. You can join it. You can rely on it. It doesn't mean everything is always as we expect. Certainly, the Jews were expecting a national kingdom with a capital city and a palace and an army and that kind of stuff.

And, yeah, no, God's restoration looks different. And this is about messengers bringing good news. And, you know, people coming back first spiritually and only later physically.

Sure, it's different. But it really is Israel's return. God will save his people. He promised it. He will do it. And we see that here. He's arranging events.

[24 : 49] He's putting things in place. He is making sure it will happen. And that makes such a difference, right? We can rely on it. I mean, I think about Mother's Day. And mothers, yeah, they work very hard.

That's a pretty tough life, right? All the extra demands of having children, the homework, and the nappies, depending on the stage of life, and all the demands, the self-denial.

Isn't it good to know that God is faithful, that he will keep you going, that salvation will happen because he is at work.

Whatever your normal day of motherhood feels like, you are part of this big thing that Jesus is putting in place, that Jesus is doing. It means you can keep going. It means you've got some great news for your children, right?

You want to teach your children about Jesus, the wonderful thing to do. But is that just a story? Something that you're not sure if it's worth it?

[25 : 48] No. You know this is real. This is substantial. You're inviting your kids into something they can rely on, something they can be part of, that is real, that will happen, right?

That's really worth teaching your kids about, teaching anyone about, anyone you're discipling or whatever. Or even when you're not a mother, if you're just in your workplace, right? The coming week will be the first five-day week in a row after a few fourth-day weeks.

My guess is most of us will feel, man, five days is long. You know what? You're going to have a, even when it's difficult, you can remember Jesus' faithfulness. You can just stop and pray and remember, oh yeah, this will happen.

This is reliable. I can give my life to this. I can love. I can serve. I can keep going. You know, I can take part in this mission. Lord Jesus, how do you want to use me today as part of what you're doing?

We can do that because it's reliable. And Jesus will make it happen. He'll keep his promises. Isn't that the good news we need? Why don't we pray?

[26 : 54] Why don't we just take a, we have time, 30 seconds just to reflect. And then I'll lead us in prayer. So just to think, how has God spoken to you?

And how does he want you to respond? Just think about that for 30 seconds. What? Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. We need your strength.

We need your spirit. We need your help. Help us to rely on you. So please encourage us. And would we see you at work in us and through us this coming week. In Jesus name.

[28 : 51] Amen.