

Seventh Sunday of Easter  
Ascension Sunday  
Year B

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Psalm 1

1 John 5:9-13

John 17:6-19

Most people do not like history - reading it or studying it. I think the root of the problem is that a lot of the high school history teachers when we were in school were coaches, frequently football or basketball coaches who were more focused on their teams than on teaching in the classroom. Therefore, their lessons in history classes focused on facts and dates, issues that could easily be tested using true and false or multiple choice questions. Thus, their classes were a series of memorizations of these facts with very little discussion on the great themes of history and the lessons to be learned. BORING! Unfortunately, this carries over into all aspects of life, including biblical readings.

The Book of Acts is the history of the early church - its beginnings and struggles expanding into an ever increasing Gentile population. This book explores the methods of evangelism and the organizational structure the apostles put into place to manage the growing assembly. Problems arose and councils were called to address those issues. But, structure was their key to handling all issues. This is obvious in today's reading.

Immediately after the Ascension of Jesus, the apostles did not go out into the field to spread the Gospel message, even though that was the final command Jesus had given them. He had told them to go back into Jerusalem and await the coming of the Holy Spirit, and this they did. However, the first order of business for Peter was the selection of someone to fill the gap in their ranks, someone to replace Judas. Peter was focused on the need to have a full roster of twelve apostles, equaling the twelve tribes of Israel. Although the method they chose might seem strange to us - who would choose a bishop by the roll of the dice - this was a common way of making important decisions in the first century. But, where is the evangelism?

It is interesting to note that neither of the finalists - Joseph Barsabbas or Mathias are ever mentioned again in the New Testament. We must assume both of them were present a few days later when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church, but there is no direct evidence of that. It is also curious, given Peter's focus on needing twelve members of the core group that, after James is murdered, there is no effort to replace this central figure in the closest group around Jesus. Why?

Perhaps the answer to this question lies on the actions of the church. Perhaps Peter understood that he was focused on the wrong things and needed to get on with the real work Jesus had given the apostles. This is evident in the actions of Peter and all of the early leaders throughout the rest of the book. On the day of Pentecost, Peter gets the ball rolling, as we will see next week. His sermon on that day was like a spark that ignited a fire in the small gathering of disciples and, as the saying goes, the rest is history.

This might be a lesson for us today. Instead of making sure we have the appropriate organizational structure in place and having our liturgy perfect, we need to focus on the true mission Jesus gave to the church - evangelism. In His charge to the disciples as He was being lifted up to heaven was to go - "go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Organizational perfection is not the key to growing the church. Beautiful liturgies and wonderful hymns, as inspiring as they may be, are not what Jesus commanded us to do. He said, Go and make disciples.

How do we do that? We make disciples by telling people about the wonderful things God is doing today in Christian County. We make disciples by telling people that there is more to life than the struggles we face trying to make ends meet. We make disciples by showing people that Jesus is alive in us and is using us to spread God's love. That is the mission statement of the Church. That is the command Jesus gave us. That is the work we are doing each and every day at St. Matt's. With God's help we are fulfilling Jesus' command by doing the work God has given us to do in this time and place.