

SERMON DRAFT FOR JUNE 1, 2025

Text: Acts 1:12–26

Sermon: “Ministry”

The Seventh Sunday of Easter is the transition from Easter to Pentecost. The ascension of Jesus on the fortieth day of Easter brings the humble character of his earthly ministry to perfection. As High Priest sitting at the right hand of the Father, Jesus’ ministry continues through the gift of the Spirit and the sending of the apostles. Thus, the Seventh Sunday of Easter transitions from Christology to ecclesiology. What Jesus **“*began to do and teach*”** (Acts 1:1) during his earthly sojourn, he continues to accomplish through the Spirit and the apostolic Church.

“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.” . . . And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (vs 21–22, 26)

The addition of Matthias to the apostolic band brings to mind the disciple he replaces, Judas Iscariot. In our text, Peter calls Judas a ***“guide to those who arrested Jesus”*** (v 16). This word, “guide,” is used in Psalm 23 of the Shepherd, who leads in the paths of righteousness; it is used of Philip, who guides the Ethiopian through the Scriptures to Christ and the waters of Baptism. But Judas is a guide on a different road. He is the catechist who leads in the way of death; he is a shepherd who leads the innocent lamb into slaughter. Through Judas, Jesus is handed over to the cross, to the will of sinful men, and to the power of the enemy. In Judas, the devil finds opportunity to bring violence upon Jesus. Through Judas’s mediating work, the devil’s will becomes a reality on the earth. Judas is the chosen apostle of Satan; Judas is the minister of murder.

However, while in this ministry of death Judas is certainly the most notorious, he is hardly alone. All of the disciples participated in the handing over of Jesus.

Peter three times denied even knowing Jesus. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, followed at a distance, but never once opened his mouth in Jesus' defense. As for the rest of the disciples, they ran for cover when the soldiers appeared. The twelve apostles failed in the one responsibility that Jesus demanded of them. When Jesus sent the apostles, the text tells us that ***“he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God”*** (Luke 9:2). Yet, on the night when Jesus was betrayed, no one preached; no one opened his mouth to testify concerning our Lord. The apostles were silent; and in their silence, they became tools of darkness.

Indeed, the power of darkness has many ministers; we, too, have been called into this ministry, called to the service of sin, rebellion, and death. The devil needs his own pastors; he needs flesh-and-blood humanity to make his will a reality on the earth. Satan can tempt, but it is man who sins. The devil can plot and plan, but it is through mankind that his evil is executed on the earth.

This is the utter tragedy of sin. Satan's will is done with our hands; his lies live on our lips; his lust finds a dwelling in our hearts; his thoughts inspire our minds and become flesh through the mediation of our own bodies. In us, the devil finds willing participants for his own ministry.

However, it is not the devil's mission simply to manifest his power among men. He must also prevent God from manifesting his power on the earth. Satan not only recruits his own ministers, but he also seeks to silence the ministers of God. The devil not only convinces Eve to actively grasp the forbidden fruit, but he also convinces Adam to stand by in passive silence. The devil not only entices the children of Israel to build the golden calf, but he also persuades Aaron, the priest of God, silently to do their bidding. The devil not only leads Judas to betray our Lord with a kiss, but he also convinces the apostles to remain silent for fear of persecution.

The devil knows that God's power lies precisely in his Word.

When our Father opens his mouth, light chases away darkness, and life is brought forth out of nothing. Through his Word, the life-giving power of the Father finds a dwelling among us. And from the beginning, his Word has been placed in the mouths of men. At the burning bush, Moses is called to speak; and when he speaks, plagues afflict Egypt, the Red Sea is divided, and Pharaoh's armies are drowned in the waters. When Elijah opens his mouth, fire comes down from heaven, and the widow's only son is raised from the dead. When Ezekiel preaches, bones come together, flesh is created, and the breath of life fills the lungs of decaying men. In the prophets, God's creative and life-giving will is done on the earth as it is in heaven.

The prophets were living icons, images of that divine ministry that would make all things new. Yet, that Word, who spoke by the prophets, has now become flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus, the Son of Mary.

Jesus is the true Apostle of the Father, the Minister of everlasting life. Adam's silence brings death on his children, but the sound of Jesus' voice restores all things. When Jesus opens his mouth, demons are cast out, sins are forgiven, and the dead are raised. As Jesus himself declares, ***“An hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live”*** (John 5:25). What joy there is when his voice sounds forth.

It is for this reason that we must rejoice in the election of Matthias to fill the apostolic vacancy. For when Matthias is elected to replace Judas, one simple truth is now learned: the ministry of Jesus himself will continue on earth. We learn that our Lord will not leave his Bride, the Church, to fend for herself against the powers of darkness; Christ will not stand by in silence. For what does Jesus promise the apostles? ***“The one who hears you hears me”*** (Luke 10:16). It is precisely in the apostles that the Word of the Father increases, multiplies, and fills the earth.

Matthias is now the instrument of him who created the heavens and the earth. The words of Matthias are the words of Christ himself; in his voice, the almighty voice of the Son of God is heard by dying men; his ministry bears the real presence of Jesus in his flesh and blood.

Thus, as we see the real presence of sin, death, and hell manifested all around us, we must give thanks to God for Matthias, the apostles, and all ministers of the Word. For in this ministry, the power of Christ to forgive sins, conquer the devil, and raise the dead becomes a reality on the earth. It is not enough for our salvation for Jesus to die and rise again; it is not enough for our salvation for Jesus to live a perfect life and receive all power and glory at the Father's right hand. If Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension are to have any meaning for us, then Jesus must call Matthias; he must send forth his Spirit; he must establish the ministry of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

In this apostolic Church, Christ's life becomes our life; his death becomes our freedom from sin; his resurrection becomes our victory; and his ascension becomes our sure and certain hope.

Matthias brings to mind the one he replaces, Judas Iscariot. Judas is the minister of death, but Matthias is divinely elected to be the minister of eternal life. Through Judas, the Lamb of God was led to slaughter by men of evil intent. But through Matthias, the apostles, and their successors, the Lamb of God continues to be handed over into our hands. For the election of Matthias and all pastors, we must give thanks. For it means that Christ is not silent; it means that our Father has chosen to open his mouth; it means that the Word of God condescends to enter our ears, to inspire our minds, to move our hearts, and to fill our flesh with his own Spirit. Jesus' election of Matthias means that Jesus' own ministry of life will continue until the end of the age.

In Jesus precious name. Amen