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Acts 1:15-26, John 17:6-19  
The One *Not* Chosen

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

<sup>26</sup>And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles.

And so it came about the Matthias was welcomed into the apostolic college, which meant that Joseph Barsabbas *was not*. This, then, is a sermon meant to comfort Joseph, the one not chosen. It is a sermon for a good man, but a man the Lord judged not to be suited for this particular path in life. And it is a sermon meant for all good men and women who seem not to be called to some worthy path.

The company of disciples nominates the two men, they pray for the Lord's guidance, the lots are cast, and the lot falls on Matthias. Perhaps the names of Matthias and Joseph are written on sticks, the sticks then rattled in some kettle, until one falls out. That is the one meant to join the Twelve. That one is Matthias. Joseph's stick remains in the kettle.

The story is peacefully told, with no mention of complaint or envy from Joseph. Yet who could blame him if he suffered disappointment? I mean, it probably would have hurt my feelings if I had to believe that *the Lord* had chosen another man, and not me. For this was not a matter of luck or randomness, but rather the Lord's choice. And it would have troubled me some that the Lord - the one "who knowest the hearts" - had known my heart and not chosen me. It would have hurt my pride.

Let us imagine it to be so with Joseph. Let us imagine him to be troubled over this apostolic election. If so, I would try to comfort him with three ideas.

- 1) No one can take away from him his faith, his past walk with Jesus, nor his present walk, nor his future walk with our Lord. Nor can anyone take away his right to believe that the Lord loves him too and counts him precious.
- 2) The Lord certainly has some other good path for Joseph to follow.
- 3) It is no bed of roses to be an apostle or a bishop. As the saying goes, we should be careful what we pray for because we might just get it!

So, first, this election of Matthias does not mean that the Lord loves Joseph any less. That Joseph *could* fear this, that he could interpret the Lord's choice of Matthias as meaning that the Lord *prefers* the man, puts me in mind of the dreadful story of Cain and Abel. Does not the cause of that ancient tragedy lie in Cain's downhearted assumption that the Lord's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice and rejection of his means that the Lord loves Abel more than him? No, Cain, that is not true. And so, the Lord pleads with Cain to get his envy under control:

So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup>The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup>If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:5-7, KJV)

Likewise with the Prodigal son and his older brother. The father’s joy at the return of the Prodigal does not mean that he loves his older son less.

And so with Joseph. The Lord’s choice of Matthias does mean that the Lord loves Joseph less.

Nor does it mean that the Lord’s blessings have somehow been withdrawn from Joseph. Nothing can change the fact that the testimonies of God’s love for Joseph are strong, and he shall not be deprived of them. Joseph is equal to Matthias in his blessings. Of all humanity, Joseph was one of a comparative handful who were permitted to walk with Jesus from beginning to end, from the baptism of our Lord to his crucifixion to his resurrection. Joseph had seen mighty things. Joseph had seen the turning point of the world. Nothing can take away that privilege from the man. He is an eyewitness to wonders and he possesses the Gospel by which he can comfort many a heart in his life. He will not be blessing many a heart from the role of one of the Twelve, for that role goes to Matthias and the rest. Still, Joseph has seen what he has seen, and so he has the right to be comforted by it and to comfort others too.

And so it is with you and me: Whatever our disappointments in life, no one can take away from us the reality that by God’s grace, here we are! We have reached this point in our life, safe and sound in the pews in Church. The Good Shepherd has been tending us too, sparing us from dangers, some of them known, many of them unknown. And he means to lead us henceforth, into worlds upon worlds and ages upon ages. His love and his keen interest in us shall never fail nor even waver a bit.

Nor can anyone take away our right to kneel at the Communion rail and to hear Christ address his words of love to us, individually: This is my body, this is my blood, *give for you!* Let everyone else fade away in all reality, including saints and popes, kings and every person who seems favored over you. Let them all fade away till there is only you left. Still, Jesus loves you so much that he wants you to know that he gave his life for you once and would gladly do it again, that’s how important you are to him.

So, that is the first point: Joseph, do not fret that the Lord loves you less. Jesus has always loved you and will henceforth, forever.

Second, the fact that the Lord has chosen Matthias to join the Twelve does not mean that the Lord has no use nor plan for Joseph. As it turns out, *both* men fade away from sacred scripture and from church history. The fact that Matthias is chosen to join the Twelve does not work out in such a way that the work of Matthias is more important in the memory of the church.

Anyway, let us remember that our God is one who regards the lowly. That was the chief thing of which Mary sang in the Magnificat. Though the Lord is great, he keeps his eye on those of low regard. That is why things are so often reversed in the Kingdom. Indeed, Jesus teaches that in the Kingdom, the first shall be last and the last first. Part of the reason for that, I do believe, is that there are many quiet deeds of goodness done on his earth that are fairly unknown, yet they are known very well by God and he means to elevate them and to let the truth be told about them. And so some

little girl who gives a cup of water to her feverish mother does the kind of good work that the world may never know of, yet God knows.

And so, Joseph: you labor ahead in your path with all your heart. Your path might be a lowly one compared to that of Matthias, yet it is still seen and cherished by the Lord, and so work away with a happy heart.

Likewise with you and me. If we are not chosen to be part of the Twelve, nonetheless our path is an important one. Chose one! Use your best judgment and choose a path. With fear and trembling, then, walk that path. But as you walk it, know that God is in you both to will and to do his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13, KJV) Walk your own path, whether it be majestic or lowly, and know that God cherishes your work.

And third, I would remind Joseph that there are burdens that come with high office, and that he has been spared those burdens. In our modern world, I should think that an equivalent office to the one to which Matthias was called would be to be appointed cardinal of the Archdiocese of New York. Archbishop Timothy Dolan seems ready and able to fill that important office with faith, grace, charm, and strength, but not everyone could do that. That is an office for which one would not want to be overmatched. To be bishop in that office would expose you to frustration and complaints from many sides, from people grieving at the closing of congregations and parochial schools, to impatient and critical clergy, to offended secular critics, to shifting and bewildering ecumenical responsibilities, to ten thousand claims on your time and energy. And all of that would pale compared to your spiritual responsibilities for the souls of the people. You would have high responsibilities for this world -- a world in which the Good Shepherd is willing to seek and to save the one lost sheep. No, it would not be good to be overmatched in this ministry. It would be better to do well the role the Lord intends for you.

Remember our Lord's parable of the talents, how the householder entrusted five talents to one of his servants, two to another, and one to another. Notice that the servant who made something of his two talents was praised just as much as the one who made something of his five talents. To both servants, the master gave the same commendation:

<sup>23</sup>His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (Matthew 25: 21, 23, KJV)

And so, that is my third point for Joseph. It is no rose garden to be an apostle. It is much better to do well the vocation for which you actually have the talents.

I think it would be good to end with the counsel of someone who knew very well what it meant to be an apostle. I mean St. Paul, who knew the full scope of this office into which Matthias is now inducted. Listen to St. Paul's stark and moving description of that holy office:

<sup>9</sup>For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles *last*, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. <sup>10</sup>We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are

weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. <sup>11</sup>Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; <sup>12</sup>And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: <sup>13</sup>Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. (1 Corinthians 4:9-13, KJV)

I do not doubt that Matthias and Paul and the other apostles had heavenly and sublime moments in their ministry. And yet, all things considered, let us ponder St. Paul's voice of experience and counsel. He speaks of contentment. He urges us to seek contentment in our own path. And so, to Joseph Barsabbas and to all who seek high office, St. Paul would remind us to cherish the office we do have and to try to find some contentment there:

...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (Philippians 4:11, KJV)

Why be content in our own state, in our own path? Because in that path, whatsoever it is, Jesus Christ also walks there, as our friend, our Saviour, and our helper. And to him be the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.