

Replacements

Please read Acts 1: 12-26 and Matthew 27: 1-10 and then pray;

Heavenly Father we bow in your presence. May your Word be our rule; may your Spirit be our teacher and guide; may your greater glory be our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Jesus – the Lord has now **ascended**. (Acts 1:9) The Son of God is exalted *above all* and seated at the right-hand side of the Father. He will soon pour out the Holy Spirit generously. (Acts 2:33) There will be a **baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire** for the disciples - orchestrated by Jesus from heaven. Then the mission to *the ends of the earth* will begin. (Acts 1:8).

Just before we move our thinking away from the ascension, let me remind you that *we too* have ascended with Christ **if we are in Christ**. Those who are in Christ are seated with him in heavenly places. (Ephesians 2:6). Paul describes this present position of the Christian beautifully in Colossians.

*Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and **your life is now hidden with Christ in God**. When Christ, who your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3: 1-4 NIV)*

That phrase “your life is now hidden with Christ in God” is surely worthy of thankful and joyful meditation. Take time to reflect on it.

Luke-Acts reveals that after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples headed down the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem with great joy. They had spent 40 days (1:3) meeting the risen Christ on many occasions and listening to his teaching about *the Kingdom of God* (1:3), and *the Spirit of God* (1:5). They were now to **wait in Jerusalem** (1:4) until the promise of the Father arrived – at which point they would be **clothed with power** for mission (1:8). Luke-Acts reveals that whilst in Jerusalem over the next **10 days**, the disciples would combine worship and thanksgiving in the Temple area (Luke 24:53) with continuous prayer in an *upper room* (1:13).

Which upper room? The one where they shared the last supper with their Lord? The one where they remained behind locked doors after the death of Jesus and into which he entered alive? Or the one they were going to use in the future for spiritual gatherings mentioned by Luke in Acts 12:12 – which was the home of Mary the mother of John. *I think it could well have been this room*. Whichever it was, this was to be base-camp for the next **10 days** as they *tarried in prayer for the promised baptism*.

Who made up the main praying group? Luke tells us (1:13) as he describes **three** groups. Firstly, there were the 11 remaining disciples – as you would expect – the tight knit group who had been designated apostles by Jesus (Luke 6:13). Can I highlight as I did two weeks ago, the two opening names on the list; **Peter and John**. These two would form a formidable partnership in the leadership of the early Church. In the first 8 chapters of Acts – it is as if their names are glued together. They went to worship together, they healed together; faced opposition together, were jailed together, were punished together, interceded and rejoiced together, and together they placed their hands upon new believers in Samaria that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17)

Now as well as the 11 disciples, Luke wants to draw our attention the presence of **the women**. These no doubt included the women Luke had deliberately highlighted in his gospel in Chapter 8: 1-3;

After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. (NIV)

Luke is known for his special interest in topics such as **prayer, poverty and riches, and the healing ministry of Jesus among desperately sick women, and their subsequent service for him.** Mary Magdalene is the classic example, and I am sure she was in this upper room. Throughout Acts Luke is keen to show the Gentile world that women served Jesus and were part of the leadership of his church. Luke is fascinated by the ministry of Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:4-7), and he can't resist telling us that *"he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied."* (Acts 21:9). Luke wants to tell us all about **Lydia's** conversion in Philippi and the church that subsequently met in her home. (Acts 16:40) And there was the much valued and committed Priscilla working alongside her husband Aquila in teaching and ministry (Acts 18:19 and other verses). Luke shows us that the Spirit was indeed poured out upon *women* and men, *daughters* and sons, *maidservants* and manservants, *girls* and boys. (Acts 2 17-18)

Is it therefore surprising that Luke specifically mentions *the women* in this upper room? Women were called into ministry by Jesus then – and have been ever since. To the women reading this sermon, I would urge you to pursue your calling and ministry under Jesus – the Jesus who reached out to you, healed you and gave you new life. The Spirit of the Lord is upon you – therefore go and serve!

Thirdly, Luke mentions that **Jesus's own family** were in that upper room. His mother **Mary** is given special mention, but there are also the **brothers**. If you read Luke 1 & 2, Mary is central to his gospel narrative – her meeting with an angel named Gabriel, her visit to Elizabeth, her Magnificat, pondering everything in her heart, treasuring the revelation from Simeon and Anna etc.... **Mary was in the upper room – praying and praising.** With her were the brothers of Jesus (4 of them according to Mark 6:3) who had for such a long period given Jesus a hard time, accusing him of madness and delusion and being an embarrassment to the family. Now all the brothers believe and worship! James, who was the eldest had enjoyed his own individual encounter and conversation with his risen brother Jesus. (1 Corinthians 15 :7) **Then he appeared to James...**

So, this was the group in the upper room. What did they do during that 10-day period? Luke stresses that they **prayed**. Their praying had two chief characteristics. Firstly, it was **united**. We are told that they met *together*, and this word "together" is a favourite of Luke's (Acts 2: 1, 44 & 46) and includes the idea of being together with **one** in heart, mind, purpose and spirit. The group were absolutely united in their prayer intent. Secondly, they were **persistent** in prayer. Luke reveals that they met continually or constantly. The prayers times were regular and united. They were extremely focused!

Luke in Luke-Acts often highlights the importance of prayer for believers and for the Christian community. In his gospel he presents Jesus's parables of; *the friend at midnight* (Luke 11:5-8); *the persistent widow* (Luke 18: 1-8) and *the Pharisee and Tax Collector* (Luke 18:9-14). These tell disciples that they must be **BOLD, PERSISTENT** and yet **HUMBLE** in prayer. Only Luke informs us that Jesus prayed at his baptism (Luke 3:21) and before his transfiguration (Luke 9:29). *Prayer opens up the heavens for the outpouring of the Spirit and the revelation of God's glory!*

What I particularly and *urgently* want to draw your attention to is this. I *firmly believe* that just as Christians today *must* possess a commitment to world evangelisation (Acts 1:8), so they must also be continually passionate about praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This manner of praying did not end in Acts 1; it is a vital and glorious feature of every era of Church history where Christ once again baptises and fills his praying, waiting people with the Spirit and with fire! If ever there was a

time when we need revival in the UK – it is right now. We need, more than ever, for the heavens to be opened and the Spirit to be poured out abundantly by the Father and the Son. Our land is a spiritual desert; dry, arid, lifeless and godless. Oh, how we need the Spirit's power and a time of refreshing (Acts 3:19) for the struggling Church, and for the dry bones of our despairing and desperate nation.

If we are ever to see this, then we will need **groups of Christians**, like this group in the upper room, to come together – one in heart, mind, spirit and purpose – and to pray humbly, persistently, continually for the outpouring of the Spirit and fire! Our constant prayer must be that of the great William Booth; **Send the fire today!** Are you interested in this type of praying? We need it – Oh, how we need it!

When I was at theological college preparing for ministry, I had the privilege of being able to study for and write a major dissertation about - **Jonathan Edwards – and his theology of revival**. Edwards was a theological genius and a leading light in the 18th century revival in the American colonies. He has become known, and rightly so, as the theologian of revival – *par excellence*. His writings on “outpourings of the Spirit” are quite without equal. Is it any wonder then, that in the midst of extraordinary revival in his times, that he wrote a work entitled;

A Humble Attempt to promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People, in Extraordinary Prayer, for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies concerning the Last Time.

That's a long title! But the title spells it out! What is needed - **What is always needed by the Church!**

And in this very important pamphlet, Edwards set out this as part of his biblical teaching;

*“It is God's will through his wonderful grace, that the prayers of his saints should be one of the great principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ's kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for His church, it is His will that there should **precede it the extraordinary prayers of his people (my emphasis)**, as is manifest by Ezekiel 36:37, and it is revealed that, when God is about to accomplish great things for His church, He will begin by **remarkably pouring out the spirit of grace and supplication (my emphasis)**. (see Zechariah 12:10)*

Can you understand the vital significance and relevance of what Edwards is teaching, and how that is what we find in our text today in Acts 1:14 with the group in the upper room, and how this is what we need if we are to experience a significant break-through in revival in our land today. God will always stir up people to pray earnestly, in a united fashion – **BEFORE** He does any new and great work within the Church which impacts the world, and brings great glory to His Name. I hope and pray that God stirs small groups of Christians throughout our nation and our world to pray, to seek the Spirit's outpouring and baptism, and to be ready and waiting to receive it. This is the only hope for **RADICAL** change to the true health and wellbeing of our nation. **United – Persistent – Fervent – Focused pleading, interceding and faithful waiting prayer.**

I was reading recently about the powerful evangelistic ministry of the American Dwight L Moody (1837-1899), and how the united focused praying of two women led to a transformation in the power and effectiveness of his preaching and evangelistic outreach.

The *other major event* in this 10-day period between the ascension and the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost was the **replacement of Judas Iscariot**. Before Pentecost arrives – the 11 must become 12 once again. Why was this necessary? Why do this *before* Pentecost? I think the main answer to this lies in the nature and spiritual infrastructure of the Church. The Church required a full complement of 12 apostles paralleling the full compliment of the 12 tribes of Israel. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is

full of teaching about the nature, glory and ministry of the Church, which is the new Temple. In **Chapter 2: 19-21** we read;

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with CHRIST JESUS HIMSELF as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building (new temple) is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him YOU TOO are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives BY HIS SPIRIT. (my emphasis NIV)***

The Church, this glorious new and holy temple was **to be born at Pentecost**. God is a God of order. Before the Church was born and filled with the Spirit – the foundation needed to be complete and right! An apostolic stone was missing! A new living apostolic stone needed to be **put in place**.

And as we see from our passage in Acts – it needed to be a stone (a person) who like all the other apostolic stones had been with Jesus and the others *the whole time Jesus had ministered – beginning from John's baptism and up to the time Jesus ascended into heaven*. This new stone **must be a witness of the resurrection**. They must have seen the risen Lord so that with all the others they might become a mighty and powerful witness and herald of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (**Acts 4:33**)

There were two candidates that met the strict criteria – Joseph known as Barsabbas and also Matthias. Eusebius the early Church historian wrote that these 2 men were part of the 72 that Jesus sent out on mission with the apostles. (Luke 10:1 ff). This makes sense and helps us to understand the importance of the 72, many of whom may have become part of the 120 (Acts 1:15) which Peter had stood up to address. But why did they decide **by lot** which one of the two to appoint? The answer is this. They decided to hand over the decision to “the Lord” who they prayed to for guidance. The Lord Jesus would make the decision. As Jesus had chosen and designated the others to be apostles after prayer (Luke 6:12-16) – so now, in this solemn moment, the Lord would choose **one** more from these two after they had prayed. Matthias was chosen.

We never read of lots ever being used again in the NT– for after the coming of the Spirit – the Spirit would bring the necessary guidance needed to choose suitable leaders and servers. (Acts 6:3, 13:2-3)

Let me say one more thing with regard to Judas Iscariot. Our passage gives graphic details of his demise and horrible death. Judas's betrayal and suicide were devastating and tragic. He hung himself and the branch from which he hung eventually gave way causing his body to fall to the ground and rupture. It was a horrible end for the man who committed a tragic and deliberate act of wickedness. Let us remember and pray for those tempted to end their lives because they cannot live with some dreadful thing they have done or failed to do. Could not Judas like the thief on the cross have found mercy – *if he had but reached out to Jesus?* Could there not have been a “returned kiss” wiping out betrayal?

The title of this sermon is “**Replacements**”. There was the replacement of Judas – but there was also the imminent, dare I say it, replacement of Jesus. *Surely Jesus is irreplaceable?* And yet, Jesus was going to be replaced, for he himself had told the disciples that if he did not go away, the Holy Spirit, his replacement **on earth** could not come. This replacement would not be confined to one geographical area as Jesus had been, but would, by his very Spiritual Nature and Power be able to live in within and alongside believers in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to all the ends of the earth. Jesus promised to send **another** Counsellor (John 14:6). Jesus had been, as the prophet said, “Wonderful, *Counsellor*, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6) Now it was *almost time* for that **other Counsellor, Comforter, Advocate, Helper and Friend** to arrive and fill the disciples with the love and truth of Jesus, and the promised power for mission. All that Jesus had been *in the flesh*, the Holy Spirit would now be *in the Spirit* – to all believers in every place and at every time.

We take up this landmark story next week. Amen!