

Two Peaks... and a Valley  
Acts 1:6 - 2:12  
Collegiate Presbyterian Church  
June 12, 2011  
Pentecost Sunday

### Bible Reading

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

<sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. <sup>13</sup>When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup>All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

<sup>15</sup>In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, <sup>16</sup>“Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus—<sup>17</sup>for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” <sup>18</sup>(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. <sup>19</sup>This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) <sup>20</sup>“For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘Let another take his position of overseer.’” <sup>21</sup>So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” <sup>23</sup>So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” <sup>26</sup>And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

<sup>2</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on

each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

### Sermon

If we were to visualize this story from the beginning of Acts,

I think it might look like this:

two mountain peaks... and a valley.

The first peak is the dramatic story of the Ascension of Jesus...

the second peak is the powerful event of Pentecost.

Forty days after Easter, Jesus departs into the heavens;

fifty days after Easter, His Spirit is poured out from the heavens.

Two mountaintop experiences.

And sandwiched in between these two lofty experiences is a valley –

an event so seemingly mundane

that it might remind of you the congregational meeting  
we are going to have next Sunday.<sup>1</sup>

The situation is this: Judas has fallen away.

(and as you noticed, Luke doesn’t spare us  
the gory details of his demise.)

So Judas has fallen away

which means that the number of apostles  
has dropped from twelve to eleven.

Well, since twelve apostles mirrors the twelve tribes of Israel...

and since twelve apostles is intended by God  
to be the full witness to the NEW Israel...  
they need to fill the slot.

They need to appoint another apostle.

So, Peter stands up and calls for the selection

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<sup>1</sup> For this image of “Twin Peaks... and a Valley” I am indebted to Thomas G. Long in “A Night at the Burlesque: Wanderings Through the Pentecost Narrative,” *Journal for Preachers*. Unfortunately, I could not locate the precise citation.

of a replacement for Judas.  
The will of God... and the very fulfillment of Scripture...  
must be accomplished, Peter says.

However, when we read how it actually happened...  
when we hear what they actually did,  
it sounds an awful lot like  
a good, old-fashioned congregational meeting  
to elect a church officer.  
There's the call to order,  
after which the moderator opens the floor for nominations.  
Eventually two names are presented:  
Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias.  
When they hear the name Barsabbas,  
someone in the back shouts, "Who?"  
but then nods with recognition  
when someone says his Latin name,  
"You know... Justus."  
Then, after a time of prayer, they cast lots  
(which is sort of a first century version of a coin toss.)  
"Anybody got a coin? OK, thanks.  
All right now – heads, Barsabbas; tails, Matthias.  
Everybody got it?  
Here we go.  
Stand back... tails it is!"  
And Matthias was added to the eleven apostles.

Well, on the one hand, Luke assures us that  
this whole process is in God's hands...  
under God's control...  
that they are doing God's will.  
Matthias gets to be an apostle  
because this is "according to the Scriptures"  
and he is "chosen by God."  
Nothing chancy about that!  
But on the other hand, there are points along the way  
that appear shakily human.  
Matthias gets to be an apostle  
because in the meeting somebody nominated him  
instead of someone else  
and because the dice rolled his way and not the other way.  
Call out some other name...  
let that die rotate one more time...  
and someone else is sitting in the Chair # 12.  
So, it's almost as if Luke were saying:  
"They had this election, see.

Peter gave a speech;  
    they called for nominations...  
        they rolled the dice...  
and Matthias was chosen by the immutable will of God.”

Which is precisely why this  
    is one of my favorite Scripture stories -  
        it's so doggone REAL!  
I wasn't there at the Ascension...  
    and I've never experienced anything like Pentecost,  
        but I've sure been in meetings like this...  
and if you've been a Presbyterian very long, so have you!

THIS is the way the church works...  
    this is the way we hope to know  
        and to do the will of God.  
We hold elections... we hold stewardship campaigns...  
    we order curriculum and recruit teachers...  
        we build buildings and call leaders...  
    we take mission trips and in general do everything we do  
        praying and hoping and even believing  
            that this is all somehow a part of the will of God.

Over the past year, we have journeyed back  
    through one-hundred years of Collegiate's ministry and mission. With thanks to George  
and Sandra McJimsey and Sara Egge,  
    it has been a most informative and enjoyable experience.  
What strikes me now... looking back...  
    is how much the history of this church is like this event  
        in the life of the earliest church.

You may recall that Rev. Charles Purmort was the man  
    who first had the vision for a church near campus.  
Yet, his own words reflect how the will of God  
    was being worked out within  
        the abilities and limitations of human life.  
“As early as 1902, I discovered the need  
    of more church influence for the students. . .  
Yet, for two or three years  
    I tried to dismiss the impression from my mind,  
and to relieve myself from the burden of responsibility  
    by arguing mentally the inexpediency and the expense  
        and the many other difficulties  
            in the way of a church organization  
                and an adequate House of Worship.  
Yet, as the number of Presbyterian young people

increased in the college,  
the need of a church and a pastor's influence  
grew upon me till I could no longer desist.  
So I began urge upon our several Presbyteries  
and our Iowa Board of Home Missions  
the opportunity and the obligation  
for a church near the campus. . . . .  
Still, it required several years of this intercession  
to awaken among the brethren even a scintilla of interest,  
simply because as I well knew,  
they did not really understand  
the opportunity or the demand in the case.”  
Nine years after Christ's Spirit nudged Rev. Purmort's heart...  
nine years after he was given this vision...  
Collegiate Presbyterian Church was founded.

Years later, many of you experienced this same divine-human dynamic  
when led by the Holy Spirit  
and believing it to be God's will  
we set out to renew and renovate our sanctuary.  
Though it took over ten years of planning  
by three different committees...  
though there were no less than three congregational votes  
(the last being 128 “yes” and 115 “no”)...  
and though it took nearly a decade for the church budget  
to recover from the fallout,  
still, believing this to be the will of God  
we moved forward.

We witness this dynamic whenever we say  
that by the grace of God we are led to call this pastor  
knowing full well that there are times  
when church-pastor relationships  
don't work out so well.

Or finally, having been given  
a renewed vision for outreach to students...  
and after much study and discussion and prayer,  
we believe God is leading us  
to create a new Sunday morning schedule  
that prioritizes 18 – 30 year olds and  
makes space for a different worship experience.

What Luke has seen and is testifying to in this morning's story  
is the presence of the Spirit  
in the day-to-day life of his church.

What WE have been privileged to see over this past year  
is this very same truth... this same reality –  
the Spirit of Christ at work for one-hundred years  
in the very human efforts of our forbears in faith.

And the reason we can even talk like this...  
the reason we dare think that God might be at work  
in this oh-so human institution called “church”...  
is this gift and this power we celebrate this morning.

The gift and the power of Jesus’ Spirit.  
Because His Spirit is with us...  
when His Spirit fills us...  
there will always be more to our life together  
than meets the eye.

There’ll be more to our worship  
more to our stewardship campaigns...  
more to our elections...  
more to our potluck suppers  
and even to our committee meetings  
than meets the eye.

Or to put it another way...  
as I stand here looking out at you,  
I see men and women and youth and children  
who are doing their level best to be the Church of Jesus Christ.  
Yet, I think what Luke is saying is that  
if I would stand here long enough...  
if I would look close enough...  
I might just see... resting on you... tongues of Pentecostal fire.