

Seventh Sunday of Easter

IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

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Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, 16 "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—17 for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry."

21 "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all this time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." 23 So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven disciples.

DIAGNOSIS: We Are Guided to the Wrong Place

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Grass Is Greener on the Other Side of the Fence*

Judas turned aside to go to his own place. Not that anyone can

blame him. We all turn aside to go to our own place. Each person has the places God has created for them—a place in history, a place on earth to live, a place with a partner, a place with neighbors, a place to work, a place to be a parent, a place to be a child. Jesus had allotted Judas his share in Jesus' ministry of mercy. Judas turned from his place given to him by Jesus. He chose to trust his place with "those who arrested Jesus." Judas chose his own actions to make his life better instead of trusting Jesus to make his life better with mercy. Judas preferred wealth over poverty with Jesus; he preferred power over weakness with Jesus. Judas preferred to be guided by his desires instead of being guided by Jesus' service of others. Judas chose to live in the place where he could judge others instead of the place of forgiveness from Jesus. Like Judas, we often prefer having our own fun over being a parent; we choose to be busy with important matters instead of playing tag with our children. We choose to spend our money on entertainment, and when we are asked to spend money to help a sick neighbor, we give a dollar and keep the extra for what we want. What we do is a witness to what we trust in.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *The Places of the Heart*

To prefer other things over Jesus is to put our heart where our treasure is—in our money, in our fun and in entertainment and in the latest electronic or technological gadgets and toys and tablets. We put our trust for goodness in our life in things other than Jesus' promise of mercy and life. It's our needs that matter, our desires that matter, our wants that matter, our success that matters. As we ask, "What's in it for me?"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Place Called "Field of Blood"*

"Me" becomes the reason for which we do anything. It's our fun and our profit that we serve. Connections to others, to

neighbors, people we work with, are restricted to ways they serve us, not us serving them. We help once in a while, but only to make ourselves feel good about ourselves. “Me” has replaced God for what we trust to give us good things. We become “smug” and feel we do not need Jesus, just like Judas did not need Jesus. And Judas’ end is the same end for us—death, a permanent separation from God, and a permanent nothingness.

PROGNOSIS: Our Place Is With Jesus

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus Made the Place of Death a Place of Life*

Jesus came among us, went in and out with us, and died on a cross for us—struggling against the law that we see as a demand, “I am the Lord your God. I shall be your God and you shall be my people.” Jesus changes that into a promise. Jesus won the struggle by his resurrection. The risen Jesus was witnessed by the disciples of Jesus, even five hundred people saw Jesus all at once. Jesus’ ministry is to give us his death so that we have life, his mercy that overcomes all judgment, his forgiveness that silences the law. Jesus has given us a new place, a place with him, a place in his mercy, a place in his forgiveness, a place with his Holy Spirit, and a place to live with him forever.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Faith Is Built in Us*

Jesus’ ministry includes giving all people faith in his promises. It’s like his promises are boards of wood used to build a house. When his promises are spoken, the Holy Spirit takes those boards of wood (the promises of Jesus) and with them builds faith in us. The Spirit needs those boards because the Spirit cannot build faith without them. We always need to hear those promises of Jesus so we can have our new place—that is, faith in Jesus.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *In Every Place We Witness To Jesus*

We now live by faith in Jesus, which means we have faith in Jesus as we are in the places God has given us. They are places to give (witness) mercy, to give (witness) forgiveness, to give (witness) love. By our merciful ways we witness to Jesus' mercy for them. Faith lets us see that doing work in the places God has given to us is obedient work and well-pleasing to God. Changing diapers, picking carrots and beans, cooking, cleaning, are all wondrous deeds to God because of our faith in Jesus who died on a cross. God made even dying on a cross a wondrous deed by raising Jesus from death. As Peter and the hundred and twenty chose one among them to be a witness of the resurrection, to be given the share that was originally allotted to Judas, so now by baptism into Jesus, we also receive the Holy Spirit and get to be witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Eventually people who are smug in their choosing of their own place will be humbled; they will be shown they cannot do what they chose to do, such as by a broken leg or surgery on a shoulder or arthritis. God does this humbling so that we see that we need Jesus' help to be put into his place of mercy that he has made for us. When we are humbled, such as when we feel we cannot handle dying or the death of a loved one, then the news of Jesus dying for us becomes very good news because he deals with death for us. In death there is life; in being blamed there is mercy; in grief there is comfort; in weakness Jesus is our strength. In all the places God gives us, we now trust they are good places, places we get to be Matthias and bring Jesus' new place to the people in the places we live and work.