

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Acts 1:15-17,21-26

NRSV

Jesus has risen, and has appeared to the apostles (and to others). He has told the disciples that they “will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ...” (v. 8). He has returned to the Father. Two of God’s agents (“men in white robes”, v. 10) have told them that Jesus will come again. They now return to Jerusalem, to the “room upstairs” (v. 13). “Together with certain women” (v. 14) and Jesus’ brothers, they are “constantly devoting themselves to prayer”.

Our reading is from the first chapters of Acts, the section where the emphasis is on the missionary activity to Jews. “In those days” (v. 15, between the Ascension and Pentecost) Peter preaches to the larger community; (“together” has the connotation of *unity*.) There will be twelve apostles: per Jewish law, one leader for every ten of the “one hundred and twenty” present. Peter speaks to “friends” (v. 16) or *brothers*. (In Luke 22:32, Jesus tells Peter to “strengthen your brothers”.) Peter says: specific predictions made in the Old Testament “had to be fulfilled” (v. 16), i.e. what God had inspired the authors of two psalms to write must happen: this is part of God’s plan. God inspired “David” (then considered the author of Psalms) to foretell Judas’ action and fate. Judas was one of “us” (v. 17), the apostles. Vv. 18-19 suggest what happened to Judas’ body after he hanged himself (Matthew 27:5): his decomposing body polluted a field, known thereafter as the “Field of [Judas’] Blood”. Two psalms are quoted in v. 20. The first, Psalm 69:25, states the curse on the enemy of the one who is godly – Judas has been so cursed. The second, Psalm 109:8, with the word “overseer” taken as meaning *apostle*, says that a new apostle must be chosen.

Vv. 21-23 state the qualifications for being an apostle: he must have witnessed the whole earthly life of Jesus, including his resurrection. The apostles meet in prayer, seeking God’s guidance in electing a new member of the twelve. They choose “Matthias” (v. 26), one of whom we know only the name. Judas has gone to “his own place” (v. 25), to damnation.

Psalm 1

NRSV

This psalm is an introduction to the book of Psalms; it contrasts the fate of the godly and the ungodly. Vv. 1-3 speak of the happiness of the godly. They do not live as the ungodly do; rather they constantly (“day and night”, v. 2) and joyfully study and observe Mosaic law; their well-being is like trees which bear fruit. They are prosperous. But, on the other hand, the ungodly are “like chaff” (v. 4): in manual threshing, the crushed sheaves were tossed into the air, where the wind blew the chaff away. So, say vv. 5-6, their fate will be disaster: they will be excluded from the fellowship enjoyed by those who follow God’s ways, and will

suffer – unlike the godly, over whom God keeps watch.

1 John 5:9-13

NRSV

In vv. 6-7, the author has stated that the Holy Spirit witnesses, “testifies”, to both Jesus’ baptism (“the water”) and his very human agony on the cross (“the blood”) – so anyone who does not accept both is not a true follower of Christ. Three things demonstrate that Jesus is Son of God: the Spirit, working in the Church; baptism; and the crucifixion or the Eucharist (the way we celebrate Christ’s death).

Now the author says that the testimony of God the Father, which he made to the Son, is much more significant than any “human testimony” (v. 9). (In John 8:14-19, Jesus says that he testifies and “the Father ... testifies on my behalf”.) One receives this witness through believing (v. 10). Those who willfully disbelieve do the equivalent of calling God “a liar” – for they reject God’s witness that Jesus came as saviour. The testimony is more than a *formula*; it is living in unison with (“in”) “his Son” (v. 11). Living “in his Son” and having eternal life come together. V. 13 is the start of the conclusion of the epistle, and (as is John 20:31), is the reason that 1 John was written: that the faithful may know that they have eternal life.

John 17:6-19

NRSV

The Last Supper is over; soon Jesus will be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. In meditation, he looks up to heaven; he prays to the Father “glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you” (v. 1). Jesus waits to be restored to heaven. He has come to earth to provide eternal life to all who believe. Now he prays to the Father for the disciples.

He has made the Father known to those who would believe. (To John, the “world”, v. 6, is notable for its unbelief and hatred.) The disciples have been faithful to “your word”, to truth, to God, to Jesus’ teaching. They have come to realize the relationship of the Son to the Father (v. 7); they know Jesus’ origin and mission (v. 8). This prayer is on behalf of believers (who are God’s), not all people (v. 9). Then v. 10: belonging to God implies belonging to the Son; Jesus’ power and authority have been shown to them. V. 11 is written as though Jesus has already risen.

Jesus asks four things of the Father: (1) that they may be “one”, a unity, as he and the Father are; (2) that they may have “my joy” (v. 13, of eternal life); (3) protection from the influence of evil; and (4) to enable them to fulfill his mission in the world (vv. 16-19). Jesus asks the Father to “protect them in your name” (v. 11), by his authority and as his representatives. The Father has given Jesus this authority. He has protected them, except for one: Judas. In fulfilment of “the scripture” (v. 12), per God’s will expressed there, he was “destined to be lost”, damned. The disciples have been “hated” (v. 14), as he was, because they are unlike others, but they (unlike him) continue “in the world” (v. 11). May the Father set them apart for service (“sanctify”, v. 17), make them intermediaries between the world and God, offering sacrifice as Jesus did in his death.