

Where was Matthias?

Pentecost, Year B – Acts 2:1-21

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, May 27, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Here's a little bit of Church trivia: Did you know that Pentecost is the last Sunday of the Easter season, not the beginning of another season? That's why the Sundays from next week to the first Sunday of Advent are called Sundays *after* Pentecost, not Sundays *of* Pentecost. So, with that in mind:

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

This week as I read this wonderful story of the "birth of the Church" for maybe the thousandth time, a question occurred to me to which I had never before given second thought: Where was Matthias? When the spirit came down at Pentecost with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, where was Matthias? People don't bother to ask this question, and I don't understand why. We all know how important Matthias was to the events surrounding Pentecost. You *do* remember who Matthias was, don't you?

If you don't, don't worry too much – he's not portrayed as a major actor in the story of the Early Church. But the fact that we just heard the biblical story of Mathias last week is what got me thinking about him this week. "Ahh!" those of you who were listening last week are saying to yourself, "That's where I've heard that name!" Well, so you won't have to go scrambling for a copy of last week's readings, put simply, Matthias was the apostle chosen to take Judas' place among Jesus' disciples. The number twelve was important because it represented the completion of God's people, so, the author of the Acts tells us, two of those who had been faithful followers from the beginning were identified, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was enrolled as one of the twelve.

We don't know a whole lot more than that about Matthias. Matthias was a follower of Jesus, but he was never in the front of the crowd. He had followed Jesus from the day he was baptized by John, yet he is never mentioned in *any* of the Gospel accounts. In many ways, Matthias was like any ordinary Christian, like you or me.

So where was Matthias at Pentecost? He had been there with Jesus and the rest of the disciples, all through Jesus ministry, through his trial, through his crucifixion. Though none of the Gospels provide a list, from the account of his election in Acts, I am sure Matthias was with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them on Easter. Along with the rest of his followers, for forty days Matthias communed with the risen Lord. Since he was counted a witness to every part of Jesus' ministry, Matthias was even there when Jesus ascended into heaven.

So naturally, Matthias stayed with the disciples after the ascension. During the next ten days, the disciples prayed and they waited, they waited and they prayed. What else could they do? The Lord had told them to wait until they received power from on high, whatever that meant. And so, they waited. They folded their hands. And they bowed their heads. And perhaps they even twiddled their thumbs. And Matthias was there, praying and waiting... and twiddling with them.

But God had a plan for all that waiting. You see the Feast of Weeks was coming, counting from Passover, a *week* of weeks, fifty days, the Feast of *Pente*-cost. The wheat harvest was coming in and people would be arriving in Jerusalem to bring their grain offerings to the Temple. The people from the towns and villages of Galilee who had been there for Passover – and for Jesus' crucifixion – would be there again. In addition, pilgrims from all over the world would be arriving to worship the living God.

So in a few days, the streets were filled with devout worshippers of God. And while Matthias and the other disciples waited and twiddled and prayed, there was a sound from heaven, like a mighty rushing wind! I am sure that Matthias and the others thought the end had come. After the wind filled the room, Matthias looked around and tongues of fire appeared and rested on each of them. Immediately they knew and immediately they understood what Jesus was talking about when he had told them to wait until they were clothed with power from on high. That power was the coming of the Holy Spirit – the power that now overshadowed them, the power that now overwhelmed them, the power that now over-filled them.

They were not alone, God was *with* them. And God had given them that power – the power to go boldly where minutes before they were too afraid to go – the power to go and spread the good news that they had seen and heard while they followed the giver of this blessed gift. So with the strength and courage born of that power, they threw open the windows and the doors to tell the good news of Jesus’ resurrection.

Okay, *now* Matthias was out of his element. He had always been a follower, never out in the front. He had followed Jesus from the beginning, but he had never been part of the inner circle. Many times Jesus had gone away with the twelve to pray, and Matthias had been among those left behind to wait and twiddle. What had the others talked about on those retreats? What had Jesus told the others that Matthias *didn’t* know? What did he need that he simply didn’t have? Matthias had never been out in front, but faithfully, he had always been there. And here he was again – standing there as one of the twelve on the balcony or on the rooftop or wherever. And there were the crowds, standing there looking at them, looking at *him*, wondering what was going on. People from all over the world had gathered to see what all the excitement was about.

I can imagine Matthias turning to Peter or one of the others and whispering, “What do I do now? What do I say?” But instead of answering him, suddenly Peter started addressing the crowd – but in Latin! And Matthew was speaking Egyptian. James was going on in Persian. Poor Matthias didn’t know any of those languages; all he knew was Aramaic, enough Hebrew to say his prayers, and enough Greek to get by in the market. How could he say anything to these people from all over the world? He had so much to tell – the Good News that Jesus had overcome death and sin, that they could live forever. But Matthias didn’t speak any of their languages. So he just started telling them the story, the best he could. Suddenly all the Elamites in the crowd were looking at *him*. He had heard them talking in the marketplace before, but their language had sounded like nothing more than a bunch of gibberish. But all of a sudden, here he was speaking the Good News – and they were hearing and understanding.

Matthias was not a great man. Hardly anyone ever reads their children bedtime Bible stories about Mathias. Mathias barely made it into the Bible at all. Matthias was just about as nameless and as helpless as any of us. And yet, God gave Matthias the ability to witness to those who needed to hear it. God gave Matthias everything he needed to do the work he had been given to do.

Where was Matthias at Pentecost? He was right where he needed to be, right there in the thick of things. He felt the mighty wind of God. He was swept up in its power. He had little ability on his own, but God used what he had, and gave him oh so much more. The Almighty filled him with the power of the Holy Spirit and used him to shed light into the dark souls of men and women who needed to hear of God’s love.

I trust we don’t have any Billy Grahams or any Mother Teresas or any Saint So-and-sos here. None of us is out in front of the Church’s inner circle. We’re all a bunch of Matthiases here. But like Matthias, you and I are people who have been touched by the power of Christ. Like Matthias, you and I are people who have faithfully followed Jesus. Like Matthias, you and I are people who have witnessed the life that he gives through his resurrection. And like Matthias, you and I know that there are people out there who need to know that life, to feel that life, to live that life. How can we tell them? What do we say to those that are lost? How do we speak when so often we can’t even speak their language, when so often we’re not even sure what language they need to hear?

Maybe if we just stop twiddling long enough to pray, we might receive the kind of power that Matthias did. Maybe if we just open our mouths and start telling the Good News, like Matthias we may find ourselves bringing that Good News to those who need to hear it most. And maybe, just maybe, the power of the Holy Spirit will be made known through me, or through you.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.