THE UPPER ROOM CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

Acts 1:12-26

Key Verse: 14

“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

In the last week passage, Jesus commanded his disciples to wait for the gift of God, the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem and promised them that they would be the witnesses of Jesus. Then he was taken up into heaven before their eyes. Now the disciples are to live by faith on earth without Jesus and to carry out the commission to be Jesus’ witnesses. Today’s passage shows us about how the early Christian church was born in Jerusalem and what they first did.

I. They joined together constantly in prayer (12-14).

After seeing Jesus’ glorious ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. It was a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. They went to the upper room where they were staying. Who were there at the upper room? Take a look at verse 13b. **“Those present were Peter, John James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.”** It is the list of the apostles of Jesus. But sadly now it is 11 all together. Judas Iscariot is missing. In the New Testament, the apostles’ name list appears 4 times—Mt 10:2-4, Mk 3:13-19, Lk 6:12-16 and Ac 1:13. Although Judas Iscariot’s name was always the last on the list in the Synoptic gospels, he was somehow among the Twelve with tremendous spiritual privileges and responsibilities. But on the last list, his name was eliminated. And it was truly a tragedy that his name was blotted out eternally. In the past, universities in Korea posted the newly admitted students name list on the school bulletin board. All applicants came to find their names on the list. Those who found their names on the list were so happy, jumping up and down. But those who couldn’t find their names were dejected and sad. They had to study hard again and take the exam the next year or do some other things. But there is a very serious name list that determines each person’s life eternally. It is called the book of life right by the judgment seat in the kingdom of God. Those whose names are written in the book of life are redeemed people and will have eternal life in the kingdom of God and have a love relationship with God eternally. But those whose names are not written in the book will be thrown into the lake of fire. So a simple question everyone must ask is, “Is my name in the book of life?” Therefore, St. Paul warned and encouraged Christians in Philippians 2:12-13, **“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”** Jesus shed his precious blood to save us and put our names on the book of life. Therefore, let us continue to work out our salvation with reverent fear and trembling and thanksgiving before God.

In the upper room gathering, we can find another unique snapshot. Look at verse 14b. There were the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. Here the women may refer to those who had been following Jesus faithfully such as Mary Magdaline, Mary the wife of Clopas, Salome, Joanna and some others. What is very surprising to us is that Jesus’ brothers joined there and prayed. According to Matthew 13:55, they were James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Jude). During Jesus’ messianic ministry, they didn’t believe in Jesus (Jn 7:5), but thought that Jesus was out of his mind (Mk 3:21). But after Jesus’ resurrection, they became believers and the members of the early church and the spiritual leaders. It is known that the author of the book of Jude is Jesus’ brother Jude. They gathered at the upper room believing that Jesus is the risen Christ and wanting to live as his committed followers. Their presence there was the convincing proof that Jesus died, rose again and ascended into heaven with the promise of his second coming.

What was the first thing they did? Look at verse 14a. **“They all joined together constantly in prayer...”** First, they all joined together. In other words, they were in one heart and one mind. The disciples were human. They had different characters and different desires. So in the past they could not get along with one another even when Jesus was with them. But after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, they were different. They could see each other as precious coworkers whom Jesus had bought through his death on the cross and made a team to work together to serve Jesus’ commission. They were all different but joined together beautifully because of Jesus who saved each of them and commissioned each of them to be his witness. So they could put aside self-centered feelings and thoughts and joined together for one purpose to serve Jesus and his soul saving work.

We all know that unity in the Christian church is a very challenging thing. One of our prayer topics is to build up a loving community through working together in Jesus. It is an essential prayer topic. How can we make it? As we know well the Lord establishes his church for his people to join together in Jesus’ name and to serve his commission. But if the members of the church refuse to join together in one heart and mind, the church cannot stand. Our common enemy is the devil, not that person in the church. Christians Join together to fight the battle against the devil and somehow witness Jesus to the perishing. In one heart and mind we must pull it in the same direction. Have you seen tiny ants work together to pull what is far bigger and heavier than themselves? Ants don’t just leave their fellow ants alone when carrying huge objects, they help each other, making it possible for them to achieve their goals by pulling and pushing them in one direction. We are far superior beings compared to ants. Moreover, we are God’s people. As God’s people, let us join together to build up Jesus’ church here to be beautiful and fruitful, setting aside our own self-centered interests and desires.

Second, they prayed constantly. In the past, the disciples had neglected prayers. Even five-minute prayer was difficult to them. At Gethsemane where Jesus engaged in his intense prayer, they could not pray but just fell asleep (Lk 22:46). They had no faith to pray and no power to pray. But after Jesus’ ascension, the first thing they did was prayer. Moreover, they prayed constantly. Their constant prayer indicates that it wasn’t one of their activities, but their main activity. What a change. The whole book of Acts shows their prayers. They prayed when they were fearful. They prayed when they saw God’s amazing work in people’s lives. They prayed when they experienced God’s rescue work. They prayed when they were confused, when they had to make decisions, when they preached and when they were persecuted. Prayer is the expression of our faith in our living God who listens and answers according to his way for our good. I can find great hope through the disciples that people of no prayer can be changed to be people of constant prayer. The first church in Jerusalem was the prayer church. It is known that Mother Sarah Barry’s life motto and nickname is “Let’s pray.” After hearing troubles and hardships from her Bible students, she says, “Let’s pray.” After listening to some co-workers’ bitter complaints, she says, “Let’s pray.” Even at the news of great and joyful work, she says, “So, let’s pray.” Through her prayer, God has done his soul saving work greatly around the world.

Humanly speaking the upper room prayer meeting seemed insignificant. They were uneducated hillbillies whose leader was killed through the crucifixion. But spiritually speaking, their small upper room prayer meeting was the first step of changing the course of human history. The upper room prayer meeting was the meeting of making a prayer vessel through which the Holy Spirit could bring the gospel and change the whole world. As members of Christ’s church here, first and foremost, we need to join together constantly in prayer. May we all join together to be established as Jesus’ church in Scarborough where God’s salvation work can be done powerfully.

II. Matthiah replace Judas Iscariot’s place of leadership (15-26).

For the upper room prayer meeting, the issue of Judas Iscariot’s betrayal and tragic death was a hot potato. Nobody wanted to talk about it and deal with it. But one day when the 120 believers gathered, Peter stood up to deal with it and resolve it once for all. In Peter’s address, we can clearly see that he was no longer old Peter who didn’t know what he was talking about. But Peter in this passage is a wise spiritual leader who dealt with the hot potato spiritually. Peter understood the issue based on the scriptures and came up with a very scriptural solution of it. Peter first said in verses 16-17, **“Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”** Peter’s point here was that Judas’ issue was the fulfillment of the scripture. Like Peter Spiritual people are those who can see thing through the word of God. In other words, they see thing with God’s eyes. Jesus saw even his own death and resurrection through the scriptures.

What did the scripture foretell about Judas? First, look at verse 20. **“For,” said Peter, “It is written in the Book of Psalms: “‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, “‘May another take his place of leadership.’”** Judas’ betrayal and tragic death was not a random act but was foretold by God before it happened. Moreover, the scripture showed the solution that another had to be raised to take Judas’ position. We learn here how to make spiritual and right decisions. One young man had to make a decision for his marriage., He thought about many things but he could not make a decision. But after a period of bewilderment, he read Mark’s gospel again and again. And as he read Jesus’ prayer on the garden of Gethsemane, “Yet not what I will, but what you will,” he could see everything clearly and made a decision to marry according to God’s will. His decision was right and his marriage life has been full of God’s blessing. Martin Luther had a strong conviction that Christians should live by faith alone when he studied Romans 1. He made a decision to start Reformation. God worked powerfully through his decision based on the scriptures. To make a decision based on the scripture is always the right and spiritual that brings God’s blessing although that decision requires self-denial and sacrifice for a short time.

Now, Peter concluded his address with the already prophesied solution by saying in verses 21-22, **“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus living among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.** Even when he talked about the qualification to be one of the Twelve, Peter didn’t set it according to his own idea. It was based on Jesus’ criteria. When Jesus called the Twelve, he chose them that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mk 3:14). So to be one of the Twelve, one should be with Jesus from the beginning to the end of his earthly ministry and one should be a witness of Jesus.

All the people in the upper room then found two candidates, Joseph and Matthias. They prayed, cast lots and Matthias was chosen and added to the apostles. In this way, through Peter, Judas’ issue was resolved and the early church in Jerusalem could have a strong and united body of Christ, the vessel of the Holy Spirit to carry out Jesus’ world mission commission.

Personally I learned that people like Judas may fail, but God never fails. God takes care of his church even when his people fail. Moreover, God turns human failure around and make his church stronger and mature. God chose Matthias and mend the vessel of the Holy Spirit. We are serving and working for Jesus’ church, not a human or social club. To let our Scarborough UBF church be Jesus’ church, we must first join together in one heart and one mind to serve the same Lord and pray constantly. To let our church be truly Jesus’ church, we must see things with the scriptures and make a decision in obedience to the scriptures. May God make us willing to have one heart and mind and pray constantly and make a spiritual decision based on the Scriptures.