

Redefining Leadership

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." (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. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

"May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it"; and "Let another take his office."

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Acts 1:12-26, ESV

The Apostles

Although the Gospels call the same people "disciples" and "apostles" (Matt. 10:1, 2; Luke 6:13), the terms are not synonyms. "Disciple" means "pupil, learner"; "apostle" means "emissary, representative," one sent with the authority of the sender. The twelve apostles (Rev. 21:14), as distinct from the apostles ("messengers") of the churches (2 Cor. 8:23 and text note), and from the rest of the disciples, were chosen and sent by Jesus (Mark 3:14) just as Jesus Himself, "the Apostle ... of our confession" (Heb. 3:1), was foreordained and sent by the Father (1 Pet. 1:20). As rejecting Jesus is rejecting the Father, so rejecting the apostles is rejecting Jesus (Luke 10:16).

Paul, the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8), announces himself as an apostle in the opening words of most of his letters. Because he had seen Christ on the Damascus road and been commissioned by Him (Acts 26:16–18) he was as truly a witness to Jesus' resurrection (which an apostle had to be, Acts 1:21, 22; 10:41, 42) as were the others. James, Peter, and John accepted Paul into apostolic partnership (Gal. 2:9), and God confirmed his status by the signs of an apostle (miracles and signs, 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3, 4), and by the fruitfulness of his ministry (1 Cor. 9:2).

The apostles were agents of God's revelation of the truths that would become the Christian rule of faith and life. As such, and through Christ's appointment of them as His authorized representatives (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10), the apostles exercised a unique authority in the church. There are no apostles today, though some Christians fulfill ministries that are in particular ways apostolic in style. No new canonical revelation is being given; apostolic teaching authority resides in the canonical Scriptures. The absence of new revelation does not put the contemporary church at a disadvantage compared with the church of apostolic days, for the Holy Spirit interprets and applies the Scriptures to God's people continually.

Today's Reflection from:
The Reformation Study Bible
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