

"POSITION AVAILABLE"
ACTS 1:12-26
SEVENTH S. OF EASTER
MESSIAH, BOERNE
MAY 12, 2024

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: ACTS 1:12-26

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

"POSITION AVAILABLE." WE MAY SEE THESE WORDS PRINTED AT
THE TOP OF A COLUMN IN THE CLASSIFIED SECTION OF THE NEWSPAPER
OR POSTED ON THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE HUMAN RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT AT WORK. BELOW THE HEADING WE MAY SEE THE TITLES
OF VARIOUS OCCUPATIONS LISTED, FOLLOWED BY THE QUALIFICATIONS
REQUIRED FOR THE POSITIONS AS WELL AS OTHER RELEVANT DETAILS
CONCERNING THE WORK NEEDING TO BE DONE.

NOW, SUPPOSE YOU WERE TO SEE THE FOLLOWING: "POSITION
AVAILABLE: APOSTLE. MUST HAVE BEEN AMONG THOSE WHO FOLLOWED
JESUS THROUGHOUT HIS MINISTRY, BEGINNING WITH HIS BAPTISM BY
JOHN TO THE DAY HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN. SUCCESSFUL APPLICANT
WILL SERVE AS A WITNESS TO JESUS' RESURRECTION." WHAT WOULD
YOU THINK IF YOU SAW A NOTICE LIKE THIS?

OF COURSE, IT'S HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT WE WILL *EVER* SEE
SUCH A NOTICE, BUT IT DOES DESCRIBE THE ACTUAL POSITION,
REQUIREMENTS, AND NEED THAT ONCE EXISTED AMONG JESUS' CHOSEN
APOSTLES. WE HEAR ABOUT THAT NEED AND THE WAY THE POSITION

WAS FILLED IN OUR FIRST READING TODAY. AS WE HEAR ABOUT THE SELECTION OF MATTHIAS TO FILL THE VACANCY WITHIN THE RANKS OF JESUS' APOSTLES, LET'S CONSIDER THE POSITION AVAILABLE REGARDING ITS *IMPORTANCE, PURPOSE, AND MEANING* FOR US TODAY.

FIRST OF ALL, LET'S CONSIDER THE *IMPORTANCE* OF THE POSITION NEEDING TO BE FILLED. IT WAS THE APOSTOLIC POSITION LEFT VACANT BY THE DEFECTION AND SUICIDE OF JUDAS ISCARIOT. AS MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE POSITION WERE VERY EXACTING: THE SUCCESSOR WOULD HAVE TO HAVE BEEN WITH THE OTHER APOSTLES "THE WHOLE TIME THE LORD JESUS WENT IN AND OUT AMONG" THEM (V 21). TWO MEN FULFILLED THESE REQUIREMENTS AND WERE NOMINATED FOR THE POSITION: "JOSEPH CALLED BARSABBAS (ALSO KNOWN AS JUSTUS) AND MATTHIAS" (V 23). BUT THE FINAL CHOICE WAS LEFT TO THE LORD JESUS HIMSELF. AS JESUS HAD PERSONALLY CALLED HIS DISCIPLES, INVITING THEM TO "COME, FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN" (MT 4:19), SO NOW, THROUGH THE CASTING OF LOTS, *THE LORD JESUS* WOULD CHOOSE *PERSONALLY AND DIRECTLY* WHICH OF THE TWO CANDIDATES WOULD FILL THE VACANCY AMONG HIS APOSTLES.

WHY WAS SUCH CARE AND CONCERN DEVOTED TO FILLING THIS VACANT POSITION? WE MAY ASK THIS PARTICULARLY SINCE, AFTER MATTHIAS WAS CHOSEN, WE NEVER HEAR ABOUT HIM AGAIN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. THE REASON IS INCLUDED IN THE JOB DESCRIPTION: "

. . ONE OF THESE [MEN] MUST BECOME A WITNESS WITH US OF HIS RESURRECTION" (V 22). JESUS INTENDED TO LEAVE ON EARTH AN ENTIRE COMPLEMENT OF WITNESSES TO HIS SAVING WORK, ESPECIALLY TO HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. LATER JESUS INCREASED THE RANKS OF HIS APOSTLES BY CHOOSING ST. PAUL AS A *SPECIAL* APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES, THAT IS, THE NON-JEWISH PEOPLE GROUPS OF THE EARTH.

JESUS' ENTIRE MINISTRY, BEGINNING WITH HIS BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN BY HIS COUSIN JOHN, IS VERY IMPORTANT—SO IMPORTANT, IN FACT, THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRED *FOUR ACCOUNTS* OF WHAT JESUS DID AND SAID DURING HIS THREE YEARS OF MINISTRY ON THIS EARTH. EACH OF THE GOSPELS HAS THEIR OWN PARTICULAR STYLE AND EMPHASIS. THEY EACH TELL THE MAGNIFICENT STORY OF OUR REDEMPTION FROM A PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVE AND WITH A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE IN MIND. BUT *ALL* OF THE FOUR GOSPELS BUILD UP TO THE SAME *CLIMAX* OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD. LIKE THE GOSPELS, JESUS CHOSE MATTHIAS AS A CERTIFIED WITNESS TO HIS ENTIRE MINISTRY, PARTICULARLY TO HIS RESURRECTION.

YOU SEE, THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD IS REALLY THE *KEYSTONE* OF THE GOSPEL. WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION, THE GOOD NEWS OF OUR REDEMPTION WOULD HAVE BEEN INCOMPLETE. WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION THE STORY WOULD HAVE ENDED WITH JESUS IN HIS TOMB, UNFINISHED, AND WE WOULD HAVE

BEEN LEFT WITHOUT THE ASSURANCE THAT OUR SALVATION HAD BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. JUST CONSIDER THE MENTAL STATE OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS AFTER HIS CRUCIFIXION AND BEFORE THEY KNEW OF HIS RESURRECTION. REMEMBER THEIR DISCOURAGEMENT: "WE HAD HOPED THAT HE WAS THE ONE WHO WAS GOING TO REDEEM ISRAEL" (LK 24:21). BUT THEN RECALL THOMAS' JOYFUL RESPONSE WHEN JESUS APPEARED TO HIM WITH THE OTHER APOSTLES AND HE WAS CONVINCED THAT HE REALLY HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD: "MY LORD AND MY GOD!" (JN 20:28).

ST. PAUL VIGOROUSLY MAINTAINS THE CRITICAL NATURE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, THE CHURCH, AND THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN IN THE MAGNIFICENT 15TH CHAPTER OF HIS FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS, COMMONLY KNOWN AS "THE RESURRECTION CHAPTER":

IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, OUR PREACHING IS USELESS AND SO IS YOUR FAITH. MORE THAN THAT, WE ARE THEN FOUND TO BE FALSE WITNESSES ABOUT GOD, FOR WE HAVE TESTIFIED ABOUT GOD THAT HE RAISED CHRIST FROM THE DEAD. BUT HE DID NOT RAISE HIM IF IN FACT THE DEAD ARE NOT RAISED. FOR IF THE DEAD ARE NOT RAISED, THEN CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED EITHER. AND IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, YOUR FAITH IS FUTILE; YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS. THEN THOSE ALSO WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN CHRIST ARE LOST. IF ONLY FOR THIS LIFE WE HAVE HOPE IN CHRIST, WE ARE TO BE PITIED MORE THAN ALL MEN. (VV 14-19)

THANKS BE TO GOD, JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS AND HIS BURIAL IN THE TOMB ARE NOT THE END OF THE STORY! ST. PAUL CONTINUES IN HIS FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS:

BUT CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. FOR SINCE DEATH CAME THROUGH A MAN, THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD COMES ALSO THROUGH A MAN. FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE, SO IN CHRIST ALL WILL BE MADE ALIVE. (VV 20-22)

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD CLIMAXES AND COMPLETES OUR REDEMPTION. IT'S TO ASSURE US THAT OUR SALVATION HAS BEEN WON FOR US, AND NOW THE DOOR OF GOD'S KINGDOM IS WIDE OPEN TO ALL PEOPLE.

"BUT HOW CAN I BE SURE OF THIS," YOU MIGHT ASK? THAT'S A GOOD QUESTION. SCIENTISTS CHECK THEIR HYPOTHESES BY FOLLOWING THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD, CONTINUING THEIR EXPERIMENTATION. MATHEMATICIANS DOUBLE CHECK THEIR CALCULATIONS. SCHOLARS OFTEN TEST THEIR CONCLUSIONS THROUGH PEER REVIEW. GOD ASSURES US THAT JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS CANCELED OUR SIN AND COMPLETED OUR REDEMPTION BY RAISING HIM FROM THE DEAD. JESUS' RESURRECTION ASSURES US THAT WE, TOO, WILL RISE FROM OUR OWN GRAVES. JESUS SAID, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL LIVE, EVEN THOUGH HE DIES; AND WHOEVER LIVES AND BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER DIE" (JN 11:25-26). HE ALSO SAYS, "MY FATHER'S WILL IS THAT EVERYONE WHO LOOKS TO THE SON AND BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, AND I WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY" (JN 6:40).

THIRDLY, THEN, WHAT'S THE MEANING FOR US TODAY OF MATTHIAS' DIVINE APPOINTMENT TO THE POSITION OF APOSTLE?

WELL, JESUS' RESURRECTION IS GOD'S GUARANTEE THAT OUR SALVATION IS COMPLETE AND THAT OUR OWN RESURRECTION TO ETERNAL LIFE IS ASSURED. THE LORD WANTS US TO HAVE THAT ASSURANCE, SO HE PROVIDED US WITH THE UNITED WITNESS OF HIS APOSTLES. WHEN SATAN REACHED INTO THE RANKS OF THE APOSTLES AND PLUCKED ONE OUT (JN 10:28-29; 17:12b), JESUS FILLED THE GAP SO THAT WE MIGHT HAVE NO DOUBT ABOUT OUR SALVATION. AS ST. PAUL WRITES, JESUS "WAS DELIVERED OVER TO DEATH FOR OUR SINS AND WAS RAISED TO LIFE FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION" (ROM 4:25).

NO GAP WAS TO BE LEFT UNFILLED; NO LOOSE ENDS WERE TO BE LEFT DANGLING. THE LORD APPOINTED MATTHIAS AS A WITNESS SO THAT YOU AND I CAN BE SURE THAT WE HAVE THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL. THAT'S WHAT A WITNESS IS FOR: TO TELL OTHERS *THE TRUTH* ABOUT SOMETHING. THAT'S WHAT MATTHIAS DID: WITH THE OTHER APOSTLES AND WITH HIS FELLOW CHRISTIANS, HE WITNESSED TO THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST. THROUGH THE FAITHFUL WITNESS OF MATTHIAS AND OTHER FAITHFUL WITNESSES, THE GOSPEL WENT OUT, AND THROUGH THEIR SUCCESSORS, THE GOSPEL HAS COME TO US TODAY. BY GOD'S GRACE WE BELIEVE IT AND ARE CERTAIN THAT JESUS ALSO DIED FOR *OUR* TRESPASSES AND WAS RAISED FOR *OUR* JUSTIFICATION. WE, TOO, ARE ENROLLED WITH THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN, THANKS TO THE GRACE OF HIM WHO DIED FOR US AND ROSE AGAIN.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, HOW GRATEFUL WE CAN BE THAT GOD FILLED THE POSITION AVAILABLE AMONG THE APOSTLES WITH MATTHIAS. HE JOINED THE RANKS OF THE OTHER APOSTLES AS WELL AS FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS THROUGHOUT THE AGES AS WITNESSES TO OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION AND PROCLAIMERS OF THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL PEOPLE IN JESUS' NAME. JESUS GAVE HIS LIFE AS THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD AND ROSE FROM THE DEAD AS THE WORLD'S REDEEMER SO THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. WE PRAY THAT GOD WILL USE US ALSO, THAT WE MAY BOLDLY TELL OTHERS THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS' RESURRECTION. ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN! (HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!) AMEN.