

## “New Church - Seeking the Lord”

Scripture: Acts 1:12-26

Graphics: 12th man, church, new start, prayer

Big Truth: After Jesus ascended to heaven, the church was brand new and had to find its way. Right now, the church in 2021 is in some ways a new church, and we have to find our way again. To do that, we have to do the same thing the first church did - seek the Lord in prayer, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are a new church!

Focus Phrase: Seeking the Lord in prayer points me in God’s direction.

### 1. Introduction

- A. I’m going to take a wild guess this morning and say that we don’t perceive that our lives are not - your life is not - 100%, fully complete. I’ll let you think about that for a second and I think you’ll agree with that assessment.
- B. Now, your life most likely isn’t a disaster. Our sense of incompleteness is fairly normal...but there may be some things that you’re missing right now - a dear loved one, a missed opportunity, a long-term dream yet unfulfilled. Maybe it’s related to the past 18 months and the things we’ve missed. Sometimes, we don’t even know what’s missing, but we can feel it!
- C. Other times, our losses and current reality are more profound - the loss of a job, a move, death of a spouse. I love what Pastor Sara said last week. “Tragedy drops the Jesus question at your feet and asks, ‘Who do you say that Jesus is?’”
- D. Your answer to that question is the foundation for your response to the fact that your life isn’t complete...and that there are some missing pieces, some you can’t even identify yet.
- E. A few weeks ago, we celebrated Easter! Next week, we’ll celebrate Pentecost, which comes 50 days after Easter. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit of Jesus came crashing onto and into the 12 apostles and all the followers of Jesus that were worshiping in Jerusalem.
- F. Did anyone catch something a little strange in what I just said about the apostles? I said there were 12 apostles at Pentecost. Wait, I thought one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, had ended his own life after betraying Jesus? That’s true...in the gospel accounts of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, only 11 of the original 12 apostles were eye-witnesses to Jesus’ last hours.
- G. They were missing an apostle. They were incomplete. And that might not be a big deal, EXCEPT for the fact that the number 12 was a very specific number that represented the 12 Tribes of the Jewish people, established by God... AND, although we’re not fully sure of the connection Jesus wanted to make between the 12 apostles and the 12 tribes of Israel, Jesus himself said in Matthew 19:28, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of

Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

- H. Clearly, 12 is an important number...but most importantly, Jesus was creating a new church. Bible apologist Jimmy Akin wrote, “By appointing twelve apostles, Jesus clearly indicated his intention to establish the Christian community as a New Israel, without depriving the original Israel of its place in God’s plan.”
- I. So that takes us back to the problem that there was something (someone) missing - there were only 11 apostles at resurrection time.
- J. In our scripture for today...the New Church solved that problem, making the 12 apostles whole again, after seeking the Lord.
- K. Even as our lives, or church, or our world is incomplete, missing things or not yet fully alive, we can follow the example of the earliest church as they sought to be fully complete in their leadership. We can seek the Lord and be empowered by the Holy Spirit for this NEW DAY...this NEW CHURCH.
- L. In many ways, the church in 2021 is not and never will be again the church of 2019 or 2020 or 1970. Now’s the time to seek the Lord and be empowered anew with the Holy Spirit’s leading.
- M. Let’s pray and then enter into the early church’s first meeting after Jesus ascended to heaven after he was raised from the dead. Let’s seek the Lord!
- N. PRAY!**
- O. Open your Bibles, please, to Acts chapter 1, starting in verse 15. Ready?

## **2. Scripture**

### **A. READ Acts 1:12-17**

- i. The 11 Apostles and more than 100 others went back to Jerusalem to get to work. They’d been following Jesus and now were hopeful for the future because of His ascension in Acts 1:11.
- ii. Peter, who was the leader of this New Church in formation, stood up and said that the scripture had to be fulfilled in the way it did...that Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. Yet, Judas was one of them...and was allotted his share of the apostolic ministry.
- iii. The things that Judas chose to do and how he did them are the topic of another sermon. Yet, the sense we get from Peter’s words here in Acts 1 is that the apostles were feeling the loss. They were feeling incomplete.
- iv. I have a really close group of pastor brothers that are doing life together. We’ve been an intentional band of men for 4-5 years now. If one of us isn’t there when we get together, we feel the sense of incompleteness. The same

happens when you have a family gathering and someone isn't there. How many times has that happened over the past year? Many, right?

- v. So, Peter needed to address the gathered disciples...and then decide what to do to make the Apostles' number 12 again. Judas made his choices - which Peter talks about in verses 18-20 in some graphic detail.
- vi. But he ends verse 20 with this quote from Psalm 109:8, "Let another take his position of overseer." Let's get back to 12!
- vii. So, there needed to be another who would come into the rank of apostle... someone who could help create and lead this New Church!
- viii. But it's the HOW that's our focus for today...look at verse 21...Peter continues his speech to the crowd...

## **B. READ Acts 21-26**

- i. Whew! There's a lot to unpack here...
- ii. First came the job description.
  - a. Among the men who were there as followers of Jesus, there were some who had been with them since the beginning. They were at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. They were there when Jesus called the disciples. They were there when Jesus healed the woman of her bleeding. They were there when Jesus fed thousands...when Jesus cast demons into pigs who jumped off a cliff...when Jesus turned water into wine, raised Lazarus from the dead, preached to crowds, and prayed alone in the Garden.
  - b. The job description of Apostle included being an eye-witness to all those things, AND when Jesus was arrested, tried, beaten, mocked, hung on a cross, and placed in a tomb. They needed to be there on that first Easter morning when Jesus - against all odds and to fulfill scripture - was ALIVE! And, they needed to have seen the ascension of Jesus a few hours prior.
  - c. Whoever it was needed to be ALL IN! I mean, ALL. IN. No reservations. No fear. Confident in the gospel and what they saw.
  - d. Tall order...but two men fit the bill. One was named Justus and one was named Matthias. And, I can picture Peter, when he said their names, pointed to them and had them come to the front, even though we can be pretty sure everyone knew these two men...and respected them as leaders and workers for the Lord Jesus.
- iii. Then...secondly, **they...prayed.** (pause)

- a. They didn't have the men give their resumes. They didn't have them give political-style speeches or debate who should be the one to be chosen. Their track record spoke volumes. They were gifted and ready.
  - b. **AND, this wasn't up to the apostles.** This decision was not up to the crowd. This was not something the church would finally decide.
  - c. **This...was...up...to...God Almighty.** This was a SPIRITUAL matter more than a practical one.
  - d. This would certainly help the New Church in formation be more than it could be without a 12th man...but it was not a human endeavor.
  - e. The hole left by Judas was created as Judas did what he thought would move the mission forward - which we know it did in God's amazing sovereign way. Yet, the hole would be filled BY GOD and not by the disciples or the apostles.
  - f. So, they prayed! They sought the Lord. They laid it out before God and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two YOU have chosen."
  - g. There was confidence in their prayer - that God has ALREADY chosen one of these two men to lead - to divinely fill that missing piece...to fill that role of apostle.
- iv. And then, thirdly...they cast lots...and the lot fell on Matthias.
- a. Now, this seems curious, right? Why not just pray and come to a consensus? Well, simply, that's not the way the Jewish culture worked.
  - b. Casting lots **could** be used as some sort of gambling, although money usually was not involved. The soldiers at the foot of Jesus' cross cast lots for Jesus' clothes. It's a game of chance in that way.
  - c. Yet, remember that the apostles and the crowds PRAYED FIRST. They took the whole thing to God and said, "Show us, Lord...!"
  - d. And then they let God have His way in this decision. My sense is that the crowd - even Matthias and Justus - would've been blessed to be led by either man. God made the final choice and it was decisive.
  - e. But they started with prayer, most importantly, and gave it to God.
  - f. And, Matthias was added to the eleven apostles that day...and he and Justus were never heard from again - at least in the bible! Seriously, their names are not mentioned again anywhere in the Bible. True servant leadership...
- C. The New Church's main *modus operandi* was to seek the Lord...and it should be for us as well. They didn't make any major decision about the future until

they prayed and sought God's will. And, we know that, from there, God was ready to pour out His Spirit on them...and will for us, too!

### 3. Application

- A. As a student of the church, I can tell you that the world and the church are being called into a new thing.
- B. Sometimes, when you're in the middle of a monumental change, it's hard to see it happening because it happens so slowly...and you don't notice the subtle changes occurring.
- C. Other times, the changes are so drastic that it shakes you to our core, desiring more than anything else to simply go back to the way it was...back to normal.
- D. The disciples may have wanted to go back to the time when Jesus was walking with them...when they were eating at the table with Him...and healing people...and teaching and forgiving and driving our demons.
- E. But God's plan for the New Church was to be empowered by their witness to those things, and then get out there and live out the mission as the main pursuit in all of life.
- F. So, they sought the Lord...and then allowed God to steer the ship.
- G. For the Panama UMC, we have some decisions to make in the coming weeks, months, and years.
  - i. Some questions have to do with how we will respond to easing COVID restrictions while maintaining safety - those are being made in weeks.
  - ii. Other questions - in the coming months - have to do with staffing, mission and vision, and where God is calling our outreach and discipleship.
  - iii. Still other questions have to do with our identity as United Methodists and if God is calling us to the next version of Methodism that stands on the authority of the Word of God while learning to love those in our community with the love of God in new ways.
  - iv. And there are questions out there that we don't even know how to ask yet - questions about who our next ministry leaders will be, which of our littlest disciples will become pastors to lead the church in the future, and yearnings for when Jesus will return to complete it all!
  - v. The New Church in 33 A.D. was wrestling with incredible hope to find Jesus at work to change the world and then passionately join Him. We are the church! These two things, I know, are true for us, too.
- H. #1 - **We are better when we are all here, cheering each other on in mission.**
  - i. The Buffalo Bills, like every other NFL team, play with 11 people on offense and 11 people on defense. Those are the rules. And those 11

players encourage and help each other, and psych each other out to play to the best of their abilities.

- ii. But on the Wall of Fame at Bills Stadium is “The 12th Man”, which is the Crowd of Fans. The crowd makes a huge difference, as we found out when no fans were allowed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 12th Man does more for the players than just the players themselves, because cheering crowds create an atmosphere of unity for the mission.
- iii. Our church’s mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our vision is to lovingly give every person in our community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus.
- iv. We do that TOGETHER. We do that while cheering each other on! We are better together...not missing anyone!
- v. And when I say together, it doesn’t have to be only physically together. We have people worshiping online, engaging in online bible studies and meetings, and who are giving online, praying online, as well as all the ways we do that in-person.
- vi. The vision for the future is a church that is 100% in-person AND 100% online. True hybrid community - not with two campuses, really, but one body with lots of ways to engage.
- vii. Once we come together in all the ways we can...

I. **#2 - We are more powerful on our knees seeking the Lord.**

- i. We are the team and the 12th man...we are the water boys, the cheerleaders (do they have cheerleaders anymore?)...we are the turf company and the coaches. And as ONE we go to our knees in prayer, most importantly for God’s will to be revealed...for God’s pathway ahead to be lit up...for our gifts and opportunities to be made clear.
- ii. We’re more powerful on our knees together. Get into one of our prayer groups that meet at 7p on Wed and 8:15a on Sunday. Start a new prayer group with others, online or in-person. Pray at meetings and when you gather for a meal. Pray for God’s will to be done. Pray, “Show us, Lord...”
- iii. Pray for:
  - a. New people in our community to believe in and follow Jesus.
  - b. Pray for our SHIFT Intentional Discipleship Process - that more people would keep Shifting to having Christ at the center of their lives - in worship, community, openness, obeying, serving, and sharing.
  - c. Pray for our community, our schools, our businesses, our service teams to be places of Christ-centered ministry.

- d. Pray for our CenterPoint funding and round two of our campaign to reduce our debt and radically serve our community in love.
  - e. Pray for our summer ministries and all the parents and students that will come to know Jesus through our VBS, our Community Outreach Team, worship, our Lunch ministry, our Connections After-School ministry, and so much more!
- J. We are better when we are all present together...and we are more powerful when we are praying for God's will to be done!

#### **4. Conclusion**

- A. Church, we're not going back to the 'way things were'. We're not going back to 'normal.' Ever. Those things are gone...and that fires me up, because God is giving us an opportunity to be more, reach more people, and love the socks off 'em!
- B. In many ways, we - and every church - are a New Church in 2021. Our job now is to press into the Lord by seeking His will in prayer and being empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- C. Are you willing to come together more and more to seek the Lord? Are you willing to come together to pray with a desperate hope that God is doing a new thing in our midst? Are you willing to worship with new passion and serve with joy and purpose? Are you all in?
- D. Human devices and plans can take us only so far...when we hit the floor on our knees and seek the Lord, the Lord answers us!
- E. We are being called to be a New Church, who loves everything about what made us what we are today, and then finding new ways to love and serve.
- F. Next week, as we celebrate Pentecost, get ready to turn the key, because the Holy Spirit is ready to fill us, refresh us, and fire us up!
- G. It's a new day...a new church...a new opportunity to LIVE for Jesus!
- H. Let's pray...