

A Easter 5

14th May 17

Place: St Mary's

Is 22.15-22

Theme: St Matthias and

Vocation

Phil.3.13b-4.1

- ◆ Today I want to reflect on vocation and ambition in the context of the story of St Matthias on the eve of his feast.
- ◆ Matthias is not mentioned in the Gospels, but he was someone who followed Jesus from the time of his baptism by John and became his disciple. After the resurrection and the death of Judas there were no longer twelve apostles, but only 11. The church decided to appoint someone else to make their number up to twelve again. Acts says they took as their inspiration our first reading today in which Shebna is put down from his role and Eliakim appointed instead, seeing Judas as like Shebna.
- ◆ They were not sure who to choose as there were several people who qualified as having been with Jesus from the beginning, but eventually two men were proposed, Joseph Justus and Matthias. They then prayed to God to discern which one should take Judas's place and casts lots to tell them who to choose, so the choice was God's rather than theirs. The lot falls to Matthias he is made an apostle.
- ◆ Let's start thinking about vocation with Judas. This is very tricky? Was it Judas's vocation to betray Jesus? It seems like it was from the

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Gospels. The Gospel writers, when they list the 12 disciples, always have Judas as the last on the list and add that ‘he was to betray him’. In John’s Gospel 13.27, at the last supper, Peter asks Jesus who it is who will betray him. Jesus says that it is the one whom he gives the piece of bread to, once it has been dipped in the dish. He gives it to Judas and John tells us that ‘after he had received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him.’ It is as though it is the reverse of holy communion, where rather than eating the bread and Christ entering into us, the opposite happens to Judas and the devil does instead.

- ◆ It seems a terrible injustice that it should have been Judas’s vocation to betray Jesus, yet equally for God’s saving work on the Cross to be done and for the resurrection to be effective, Jesus needed to be betrayed, arrested and crucified.
- ◆ Alternatively, maybe it was only after the events of Holy Week and Easter; as the disciples tried to make sense of what had happened, that hind sight made it seem inevitable that Judas would betray Jesus. Maybe it was easier to think that than to acknowledge that it could have been any of them. Whatever the truth of the situation, one thing that we can be certain of is that being called by Jesus and answering that call is no guarantee that we will not betray him.

- ◆ The early church turned to the story of Shebna in Isaiah by as they wondered what had happened with Judas and what they should do next. Interestingly, it is a story of overweening ambition, rather than vocation. Shebna has built himself a very fancy tomb in a very prominent place. The story reminds me of the very grandiose tombs we have in our church yard here. Shebna is an ambitious man and he wants to immortalise his achievements and the heights his ambition has bought him to. He may have been born of humble stock, but he intends to be buried high up among the great and the good.
- ◆ Isaiah comes to see him at the magnificent tomb and tells him that God's plans for him are quite different. His pride and arrogance mean that he will not end his life as he had hoped, at home in a position of honour, but rather he will die in a strange land as a prisoner of war or a refugee.
- ◆ It is a reminder that we ignore God's call in favour of our own agenda at our peril. Just because we do not heed God's call does not mean that God will not act in our lives, it means that when God does act the consequences are likely to be bad for us.
- ◆ Vocation is in many ways the opposite of ambition. Ambition is about pursuing our own agenda and fulfilling our own desires. By contrast vocation is about obedient listening to God's call to us. Maybe the problem with Judas

was also one of ambition. Ultimately, he did not want to follow Jesus, he wanted to take things into his own hands and make them happen. What he wanted took precedence over following Christ.

- ◆ This does not mean that following our vocation inevitably means not having what we want, rather vocation is about putting God first and learning to want the right things, learning to want what God wants for us and the world. Ultimately what God wants for us and the world is so much more than we can either hope for or imagine. God wants far more for us than a really fancy tomb when we are dead. God wants us to discover and inhabit the joy and glory of eternal life. God wants us to become citizens of heaven, he wants us to inhabit his Kingdom.
- ◆ What the kingdom is, what it means to be a citizen of heaven and be born again is a deep mystery, the mystery that lies at the heart of Jesus teaching and Christian discipleship. We do not, we cannot know it from the start, but what each of us is called to though our baptism is to discover that. Along the way, we may like Matthias be called to particular offices or roles in the church, or we may be called to particular roles in the world God loves so much. Whatever the details of our vocation are however, ultimately we are all called to know and inhabit the mystery of Christ's kingdom and we will

only do that by attending to and being obedient
to Christ's call in our lives.