

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro  
16 July 2023

10:30 a.m. MT Worship  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Calvary Baptist Church  
Denver, Colorado

### ***“Matthias (12b)”***

Sixth sermon in the summer series, “Seeing Ourselves in the Twelve”

*Luke 10:1-3; Acts 1:1-4a, 6-11a, 12-26*

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

*NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.*

Today we meet Matthias. Or as I like to call him “12b” – the one who replaced Judas Iscariot.

Like an actress who is cast as an understudy for a leading role who learns all the lines and goes to all the rehearsals never knowing *if* her moment will come, never knowing if there will be a night when the curtains draws and it’s *her* time to shine – so Matthias is a faithful disciple who follows Jesus, day by day, behind the scenes.

Like an athlete who is third string, who practices every day with the team and runs extra drills to perfect his skills, never knowing *if* his moment will come, never knowing *if* there will be a game when the coach calls his name to go in – so Matthias is a faithful disciple who follows Jesus, day by day, on the sidelines.

But – UNLIKE our understudy actress or our third string athlete, who both at least know there *is* a possibility that their

moment will come – albeit usually dependent upon illness or injury of somebody else – Matthias has no reason to ever believe there will even be a chance at being one of the Twelve that Jesus chooses. The Twelve are the Twelve. There is no Baker’s Dozen with an extra donut (or disciple) “just because.” It’s not like Jury Duty where there is an alternate designated to step in just in case someone cannot fulfill their duty to the end. No, Jesus never picked any “alternates,” any understudies, or chose a “b” team when he picked his disciples.

Matthias – whose name we never know or hear until this moment in Acts 1 after Judas Iscariots’ death – is apparently just a guy who was faithfully following Jesus, without any expectation of accolade or promotion or recognition.

I wonder if he ever knew *his* moment would come? That God had something in store for him

that he never saw coming? So often in life we can think that our journey is set in stone, or that our pathway has been laid out for us and we just need to walk it. And that may be the case for a season, but we must always have our hearts and minds open for how God might surprise us along the way. For the sharp U-turn that might arise or the unexpected exit ramp that will lead us in a slightly different direction. Or a pothole that causes our tires to blow out and brings us to a full stop altogether.

We never know what our future will hold, just that God holds our future.

And so, even when life is not unfolding like we want it to, even when we think we've missed our chance at some "big thing" like: owning a home, going back to school, getting our dream job, starting that business we always wanted, meeting our person, having children, moving away from home or moving back home – even when we think something is "just not in the cards for us" because of unexpected illness or death or tragedy – God might just surprise us still yet.

This is what happens to Matthias – and it can happen to you and me too.

First, a bit of background on the difference between a Disciple and an Apostle. It's an important distinction to understand for our whole summer series, *Seeing Ourselves in the Twelve*, and it makes sense to explain it today because it's directly relevant to Matthias' story.

The word disciple (in the Greek) means "student" or "learner." Every person who follows the teachings of Jesus is called his disciple. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus says, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...*" In Acts 6:1 we read, "*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing...*" Both these verses indicate that disciples can be never-ending. The word disciple simply means one who follows the teachings of Jesus and shapes their life around them – whether or not they ever met Jesus or not. You and me? We're disciples.

Apostles, on the other hand, are "messengers" (that's the Greek meaning), literally "ones who

are sent.” An Apostle is anyone sent on a mission in the name of Christ and who is given the authority of the one who sent them...meaning they met and knew Jesus and he “sent them out.”

So again – Disciples were simply any of Jesus' followers who devoted themselves to learning from him. Apostles were people who had met and followed Jesus during his life **AND** were called and commissioned by him to spread the gospel.

Every apostle was a disciple, but not every disciple was an apostle.<sup>1</sup> Make sense? Are you still with me? ☺

There were many followers of Jesus in his day, many “disciples,” but only a select group of those were chosen by Jesus to be the Twelve Apostles. This distinction is really not made by Jesus when he is alive; it only becomes relevant after his death. When Jesus is no longer here to fulfill his mission, he needs to “send out” or “commission the Twelve” to do that on his behalf. In other words, the Twelve disciples

who have been his closest followers while he was alive, are now the ones who he will send out and bless to be his Twelve Apostles as well.

Why the heck does this matter?

Well, it matters a lot if you are Matthias. Matthias was **not** one of the original Twelve. He is chosen to replace Judas Iscariot after Judas dies. And by the way, I realize we have a graphic description of Judas' death in today's text; I won't be dealing with the manner of Judas' death or its meaning in today's sermon. Judas Iscariot has his own Sunday in this series coming up. All that you need to know today is that Judas Iscariot died, leaving only 11 of the original 12. And that was a problem.

Why? Well you see, Luke (the writer of Acts) has an understanding of The Twelve as not only Disciples or Apostles, but are “eschatological representatives of messianic Israel.” Which is a fancy way of saying that he believed that the Twelve disciples of Jesus were meant to represent, in a new way, the twelve tribes of Israel;

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<sup>1</sup> Information accessed on July 16, 2023 at <https://www.gotquestions.org/difference-disciple-apostle.html>.

they were to fulfill the work of God to completion and bring about the new, all-inclusive people of God – just as the 12 tribes had done for Israel. If you think of the Twelve in this way, it was *essential* that the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot be filled immediately in order to fulfill this function.<sup>2</sup> And you can sense the urgency in the text. Jesus had just ascended, the disciples are headed back to Jerusalem and were to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and there was a real feeling that if a twelfth apostle was not named as a replacement for Judas Iscariot then the group *would not* receive the Spirit of Pentecost (Acts 2). The coming of the Spirit was not just a promise of Jesus' presence with the disciples, it was also believed to be what empowered them and commissioned them and "sent them out" as ones who were apostles – remember 3,000 people were baptized on Pentecost! This ability to be sent out in Jesus' name to serve, heal, teach and spread the good news is what would bring about the fulfillment of what the

twelve tribes of Israel began<sup>3</sup> (according to Luke and this line of thinking).<sup>4</sup>

In this worldview (which, I would be remiss if I did not say many view as Supersessionist today), the number 12 really matters. And Judas Iscariot's death poses a problem because all the sudden there are 11 instead of 12. And – *and this is where it gets juicy* – there is controversy over whether Matthias should have been chosen as the final one to complete the "Twelve" or someone else. Can you guess who? And hint it's NOT Joseph called Barsabbas also known as Justus!

The Apostle Paul. Paul believes Peter got *a little too eager* to replace Judas Iscariot because the slot of being the 12<sup>th</sup> Apostle was meant for him. But wait – I know what you're thinking Paul wasn't a "disciple" who followed Jesus when Jesus was alive...he persecuted those who followed Jesus. So how could he be an Apostle if he wasn't first a Disciple?

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Martin, "Matthias," from *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 4, K-N* David Noel Freedman, editor (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 644.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, *ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> Now, some scholars say that it is doubtful that the twelve disciples functioned in this sense outside of Jerusalem (which was the hub of Judaism of course) OR

that they functioned for very long as a definite group within Jerusalem – they all scatter pretty quickly after all. However, this line of thinking is referenced in Revelation 21:14 which implies that there was definitely a select group of twelve apostles because their names are written on the twelve foundations of the walls of the New Jerusalem.

I mean, according to Luke, as we read in today's passage in Acts 1:21-22, the qualifications for being an apostle included having been with Jesus *during* his ministry.

But Paul, you see, names himself as an *exception* this qualification. Although he did not accompany Jesus on his earthly journey and was not a disciple, per se Jesus as the Risen Lord made a *special appearance* to him on the road to Damascus and set him apart as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:14–18).<sup>5</sup>

Ahem. Sigh. Yep, so for Paul, one could become an Apostle even if you didn't follow Jesus while he was alive, as long as you had an appearance from the Risen Christ and were "sent out" on mission by Christ, by his authority.

But Luke, the author of Acts, viewed things differently. Luke said, "*No you had to have accompanied Jesus from the beginning as a Disciple.*"

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<sup>5</sup> This is why Paul compared his place among the other apostles as "one born at the wrong time" as he says in 1 Corinthians 15:5b-10: "*Jesus that he appeared to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles*

I told you this got juicy! But for today – we're siding with Luke because today is about Matthias and his story and Luke is the one who wrote his story.

Now, Peter makes this qualification of following Jesus during his ministry clear as he convenes the Eleven together to cast lots between "Joseph called Barsabbas also known as Justus" and Matthias.

While we don't know all of the reasons why "Joseph called Barsabbas also known as Justus" and Matthias were The Two – it is clear that they met the minimum qualifications according to Peter: they were present with Jesus throughout the entirety of his ministry...all the way from baptism through the blessing at the ascension. *This* is what made their names rise to the top for the casting of the lots.

Casting lots, by the way, was an ancient practice where stones with names on them were put in a bag or vessel which was

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*and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*" In a sense – Paul is acknowledging that he is not the same as the original Twelve, yet says by the grace of God (and his own hard work) he becomes like one of them.

shaken until one fell out and whatever name came out was believed to be from God.<sup>6</sup> So, as his name was the one on the stone that came out of the bag, it was Matthias' "God-given lot" to be chosen.

From this whole procedure, we learn something really important about Matthias. When his moment came, when his time came – he was ready. And he wasn't just "ready" because God had "pre-ordained" him to be chosen as Apostle 12b. He was ready because before he even knew it would ever be a conceivable possibility that he would become "one of the Twelve" Matthias was faithfully following Jesus – without special status or designation or title. He was preparing – even though he knew not what for.

For example, it's believed that Matthias was one of the 72 that Jesus sent out which we read about in Luke 10 today. Which, by the way, was a really hard assignment. Jesus said, *"I'm sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves,"* (Luke 10:3). Jesus says *"the laborers are few"* – (I wonder why?! – *but here you are – 72 of you – who are willing to be laborers –*

*so go out and do the hard labor.* We know from the rest of that story that the disciple pairs had to sometimes just shake the dust off of their feet and keep going when people would not receive them in their homes or when they got the door slammed in their face. It was tough work. Being a disciple was hard enough – but this story really epitomizes what it was like to be a follower of Jesus and go out on own's own for the first time WITHOUT Jesus. It's definitely not for the faint of heart.

Matthias is believed to be one of these 72 pairs – and guess what? He returns from the assignment to keep following Jesus! I mean, if he was ever looking for an "out" this would be it, right? Just go get lost in some village and never return! (*"Where's Matthias?" "Oh I don't know...I'm sure he's one village back...he'll catch up with us soon enough..."*)

And this is where we can draw great inspiration from Matthias' faithfulness, day by day. He doesn't give up or throw in the towel when the going gets tough.

<sup>6</sup> Conzelmann, Hans. *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, edited by Eldon

Jay Epp with Christopher R. Matthews (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 12.

Matthias' faithfulness is what put him in a position for God to ultimately choose him and say, "*NOW is your time.*" Had Matthias not followed Jesus faithfully, or been present day in and day out, through the not-so-fun parts of ministry, and the less than glamorous work – he would not have been around or even prepared for his moment in this life. It's like preparing as if you were an understudy for the leading role in the play, without anyone asking you too. It's like showing up – doing whatever it takes – to get to play in a game, even if no one believes in you – cue the movie *Rudy*, right? *Rudy* is a Matthias story if anything is. A guy who does everything just to put himself in proximity to the team he dreams of playing for...just for the chance of that one play on the field.

I do wonder about early on when Matthias was walking around with the early crowds following Jesus if he was disappointed when Jesus had called others while they were fishing or tax collecting and all the sudden there was not more calling. Like, I'm sure he was hoping...maybe Jesus will choose 14 or 15 or 20...kind of hoping he still had a chance. Like Roses being handed out on the Bachelor, Matthias hoping

that maybe there was one more rose up Jesus' sleeve. But then one day he surely realized – nope. The roses are gone. The team is selected. The cast has been set. And I didn't make the cut.

He *must* have been disappointed – and yet – he remained faithful.

What does it mean for you to remain faithful even in times of disappointment or uncertainty or when you don't know if your hard work and faithfulness will ever pay off? Or IF it will pay off?

Matthias' story shows us that we really never know what God is up to in our lives. That maybe it's true that it really is "never too late." That God may still have a plan for us yet – beyond what we would ask or imagine. And – that plan or that opportunity – cannot come without God's prompting. But it also cannot come without our preparation. We must ready ourselves, and always be ready for the opportunities that could be ahead.

I remember as ministry resident, I went to every single event at the church that I could – every Bible study, every church school class (for all ages), every

deacon's meeting or budget meeting or communion preparation session. I went to worship services I was not assigned to lead, Bible studies I had not part in, and visited people in the hospital who were not on *my* list. I was like a sponge. I wanted to learn all that I could from the ministers and lay people at the church, they were a teaching congregation after all, and I knew that even though I was not called to be a "Children's Minister" for example – I was going to one day be many children's pastor and probably also the supervisor for someone who worked with kids. I wanted to learn how you talk to kids about faith (still learning that today!) and I wanted to understand more deeply the challenges that families face.

Many educational experiences and residencies are like this. They have requirements that are set up for you to take part in, but then you can also make even *more* of the experience, by going to extra stuff and learning all that you can by taking advantage of different opportunities. (And sometimes that means NOT going to something so that you can reflect more deeply on what you have learned.) But the point of

taking advantage of the most possible is that you never know what you will need to know in the future. You never know the knowledge you don't know until you learn it. You never know what experiences you have Today that God might use for Tomorrow.

And in this way, Matthias' story gives all of us hope. His story gives us hope for that area in our life, or areas, where we just feel like things aren't quite complete or aligned or jiving, or maybe where we desire something more. Where we really want something and may even be praying for it – but we're unsure if it will ever unfold. Maybe it will and maybe it won't. But if we stop preparing, and stop being ready – then it *definitely* will never happen.

It's like being that third string player on the team. If you stop practicing then the coach is definitely to bench you or cut you right? But if you do keep practicing – you might have the chance to eventually play.

Our little actions – each and every day – make a difference. Our attitudes make a difference. Our belief that we have gifts and



skills to offer makes a difference.

So whatever area in your life right now feels like there is still something yet to come or something yet to unfold – use Matthias' story as inspiration and be encouraged to “keep on keeping on.”

As cliché as it sounds – try and trust in God's timing. It is a cliché, but as I said a few weeks ago, cliches are cliches for a reason – they do hold truth. And while “trusting in God's timing” sounds pithy – it's only pithy sounding if you passively just say that phrase without any effort behind it. But if you put effort behind your words, if you continue to be faithful in your education, your preparation, your relationship-building, your organizing, your self-learnings and self-care, your professional development and your spiritual practices – if you keep putting in the faithful practice of whatever it is that you have passion for – God will find a way to use you – and it may just be something you had never thought of before.

Because the thing is – figuring out God's timing – involves three factors, as we see with Matthias' story.

First there is Self – in this case – Matthias' desire and availability and gifts and qualifications. He's at the right place and the right time because of his life's preparation as a follower of Jesus. He's put in the time and effort and learned at the feet of Jesus. And he's continued to stick around – which means he kinda wants it. He likes hanging around Jesus. He is a disciple through and through as proven by his actions – which has prepared him to now be an apostle.

Second, there is the role of Others...the community's will and discernment. Their collective decision to put two names forward and then to pray together about those names. Peter says, “*Lord you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen.*” The community sensed the gifts and skills of both men (Barsabbas and Matthias) and honestly – probably either one would have been great. They might have even been indifferent to which one was chosen, leaving the rest up to...you guessed it – God!

Because you see it's not just the person who feels like they want something that matters OR the

community who wants someone for a specific task or role – there is also the *God factor*, right? The “Divine” in “Divine timing.” Or the sense of “Right” in maybe this is the “Right season” for you for this specific thing, or maybe it’s not. In our text today God’s will or desire was made clear by the casting of lots falling to Matthias. (It was also clear this WASN’T Barsabbus’ time to serve in this way; we can trust he had a meaningful life doing something else altogether.) We have different methods today than casting lots, but the meaning is the same. Beyond self and community, when making a decision we must ask, is there also a sense of rightness about the timing for this season in one’s life?

This is where the rubber hits the road in sensing “God’s will.” We could be highly skilled and qualified for something. People could want us to serve or work in that position and even ask us to do so. But if something feels off – the timing or just a gut feeling or maybe just the sense that whatever it is gives us more anxiety and dread than joy and hope...then maybe it’s not that

we can’t do something or even that we’re not meant to do it down the line in the future – but that *right now*, in *this* time and place, it’s not where God needs us. Maybe we are needed with our family or in a different role of service or job. Maybe God wants us to focus on our relationship with God through prayer or spiritual practices or own emotional healing or physical health. There are so many possibilities.

Culturally we put a lot of pressure on ourselves around decisions.

In Eminem’s hit rap, “Lose Yourself” from the movie *8 Mile* he says:

*Look, if you had one shot or one opportunity  
To seize everything you ever  
wanted in one moment  
Would you capture it, or just let  
it slip? Yo...*

*You better lose yourself in the  
music The moment, you own it,  
you better never let it go (Go)  
You only get one shot, do not  
miss your chance to blow  
This opportunity comes once in  
a lifetime, yo...<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Eminem, “Lose Yourself” from *8 Mile* Soundtrack (2002), lyrics accessed on July 16, 2023 at <https://genius.com/Eminem-lose-yourself-lyrics>.

And in Lin-Manuel Miranda's acclaimed Broadway musical, *Hamilton*, Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, at age 19 sings about how he won't take any of life's "No's" for an answer. "Like a young 50 Cent, he will achieve success or die trying...He talks about his distaste for the colonizing British and his hope to be remembered throughout history."<sup>8</sup> He raps about taking the one chance he feels like he has to make the most of himself and his knowledge, skills, and experience to change the world, or his corner of it anyway. In the song, *My Shot* from Act I, over and over he belts:

*And I am not throwin' away my shot  
I am not throwin' away my shot  
Hey yo, I'm just like my country  
I'm young, scrappy and hungry  
And I'm not throwin' away my shot*<sup>9</sup>

The thing is – with both of these raps – there is a sense that these young men realize The Moment that is upon them and how they *must* rise to the occasion. They know something important is

happening and it's their time to shine and step up. To put fear aside, and take ahold of their life with all that they have and all that they've been working for and all that they believe in.

And yes, these types of moments in our lives, when they come, tend to be crystal clear. At those pivot points, we have a deep awareness that this, *THIS*, is THE moment. And we can't stay silent or we can't not say something. We can't say no (or yes). We can't *not* say yes to the job of our dreams even if it means uprooting all we have built and created thus far. Or we know we must say 'no' to the person we've been dating who looks perfect on paper but just isn't the 'one' for us – for reasons that are impossible to articulate.

These type of moments are rare in life, but they tend to be easier to recognize and identify and grab a hold of. We know not to miss them.

But *most* moments of our lives are not those types of moments.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Uitti, "Behind the Historical Meaning of 'Hamilton's' 'My Shot' by Lin-Manuel Miranda," *American Song Writer* (2022), accessed on July 16, 2023 at <https://americansongwriter.com/behind-the-historical-meaning-of-hamiltons-my-shot-by-lin-manuel-miranda/>.

<sup>9</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda, "My Shot," *Hamilton: An American Musical* (2015), lyrics access on July 16, 2023 at <https://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/hamilton/myshot.htm>.

Most of the moments in our lives are not just “one shot” or “one opportunity” moments. They are much murkier.

How do we know if maybe it’s time to start looking for another job even though the job we have is fine, it’s just that maybe we’re not challenged anymore?

How do we know if we should allow our kids to live one more year with us rent free or really push them to begin paying us rent or to move out on their own?

How do we know if it’s time to go through our mom’s house after she’s died, or if we need another month or two of processing our grief before beginning such a massive task?

How do we know if we should say yes to this volunteer task or pass this time because there’s just a bunch of other stuff going on in our life? Or when do we know when it’s time to step down from something we’ve been doing forever that we love?

These decisions are less clear cut. There is rarely a right or wrong answer. But sometimes we agonize over them just because there isn’t a “right”

answer. We can see both the pros and cons of each decision.

With no shade given to Eminem or Lin-Manuel Miranda, when it comes to faith, and yes even, most everything in life, truth be told, we never just have ONE shot. God is a God of Grace and we always have a second opportunity, a third chance, a fourth time to say “yes, *now* is the time” – I wasn’t ready before, but now I am. Yes to this moment and this decision.

The question is *not* how are you dealing with the fact that you’ve missed your one shot or one opportunity and are now resigned to live without your dreams coming true. The question is – are you preparing for the next opportunity that God has for you? Whether you know what it is or not? Are you open to how God might call you to step in and step up in a way you never thought of before? Or even to step down or step aside to make the way for another who God is calling?

And yeah, sometimes the best YES we can say to what God is preparing for us down the line is a NO to an opportunity that is right before us today. It’s not easy to discern, I get that. But trust yourself. Trust your

community – and listen to those voices of wisdom around you. And yes, trust God. Trust that there will be some kind of divine sign or confirmation that will make it clear to you that *This is the Way...for Today*, anyway.

You know, in Hebrew Matthias means, “*Gift of Yahweh*.”<sup>10</sup> And Yahweh is from the Hebrew root verb that means “to be.” Or as in Hebrew tradition, *Yahweh-Asher-Yahweh* which means “He Brings into Existence Whatever Exists.”<sup>11</sup>

Matthias, in name and in example, is a Gift of “Being” or the Gift of “That which is brought into Existence by God.”

**What would happen if we looked at our life that way too? If we believed that our very life is a gift of God’s very being? A gift that God is bringing into existence at just the right time for just the right purpose?**

Now *that’s* something we can “lose ourselves” in...not that there’s just one shot or one opportunity for us as disciples...but that wherever we

are...God is...and wherever we are going...God is becoming...

Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> Ryan Nelson, “Who Was Matthias the Apostle? The Beginner’s Guide,” *OverviewBible.com* (Sept. 10, 2019), accessed on July 16, 2023 at <https://overviewbible.com/matthias-the-apostle/>.

<sup>11</sup> Information accessed on July 16, 2023 at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yahweh>.