

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan, Jr.  
Sermon Text: Acts 1:12-17, 20-26  
Sermon Title: "Pray" (Pentecost)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA  
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**{SLIDE 1, TITLE SLIDE}** We know the story of Pentecost that relates to Jesus' ascension to heaven.<sup>1</sup> He tells the 11 remaining disciples to watch for the Holy Spirit to arrive. When the Holy Spirit comes, the disciples will be given the ability to minister to all sorts of different people. Jesus ascends to heaven, and the disciples have to be told to stop gawking and start waiting for the Spirit.

We know the story of Pentecost that relates to the coming of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The disciples are all together in an upper room. A rushing mighty wind bursts through the windows. Flames settle on the disciples. Everyone is able to speak a different language they had not know minutes before. Some people think they are drunk, but Peter sets them straight. He quotes Scripture and talks about a time, when the Holy Spirit will rest on people and give them the ability to prophesy. A call for repentance is issued, and people come forward to become followers of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:4-11.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:1-39.

We might not pay much attention to the story in the middle of all this. Something happens in that 10-day period between Jesus ascending to heaven and the Holy Spirit arriving on Pentecost. There are 10 days that are accounted for in Acts 1, 10 days that are used wisely and prayerfully.

**{SLIDE 2}** The remaining disciples are named in verse 13. They find an upper room in Jerusalem in which to reside. Some theologians think this might be the same upper room, in which they ate their last supper with Jesus. It very well could be, or maybe they chose another upper room that was available. They go to this place in order to separate themselves from the busyness of life. They go to commune with each other and allow nothing to disrupt them. If they had cellphones, they would have been turned off for that 10-day period. No connection with the digital world, when it is unnecessary. Just a connection with each other. They gather together as remaining disciples along with various women and Mary, the mother of Jesus. They stay in this upper room and pray.

It doesn't sound too thrilling, does it? To pray for 10 days straight. It doesn't sound as exciting as playing videogames for 10 days straight, or surfing the TV channels or Youtube channels for 10 days straight. The point here is not what thrills the disciples. The

point is what prepares the disciples for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. If they had cellphones, they could waste away the days and connect with all sorts of people through Twitter or Facebook or email or texting; but when the Holy Spirit comes they wouldn't have fertile hearts and minds to receive the power the Spirit gives. If they had videogames, they could finish off the final boss at the end of 10 days, but they would have no clue how to face Satan and all his distractions and schemes that pull people away from Jesus. No, the disciples and all those gathered, including Jesus' mother, spend the time wisely. They prepare themselves with prayer, whether it thrills them or not. What is thrilling about prayer is that they will be ready when the Holy Spirit comes with all of God's transformational power.

**{SLIDE 3}** What is sad about our society today – and I mean is about our Christian society today – is that prayer is not thrilling. We don't view it as thrilling. Prayer is something we give lip service to, and we may bow our heads for a few minutes on a Sunday and call it prayer. Prayer tends to be an afterthought after we do all those other “thrilling” things we like to do.

Henry and Richard Blackaby, two Baptist pastors that we might have heard of, wrote a wonderful book

called *Spiritual Leadership*. In one of those chapters they wrote persuasive reasons for why Christians should pray with God. After reading those chapters, the reader feels the call to step up his or her prayer life and connect with God more often. However, at the beginning of this one chapter, the Blackabys say something that is disturbing. They says that “the first thing leaders [and even Christians] should do is... the last thing many leaders actually do.”<sup>3</sup> {SLIDE 4} Christians tend to do all the legwork and all the thinking and planning before they do any praying. They think that they have to do something first, and then get God on board with what they hope to do. At the end they pray and expect God to rubber-stamp all their legwork and plans, but sometimes God doesn’t. God doesn’t because the legwork wasn’t God’s legwork. The thinking and planning didn’t come from, God. The end result is not what God envisioned the entire time. “The first thing leaders [and even Christians] should do is, sadly, the last thing many leaders actually do.”

If the disciples and followers of Christ spend no time in prayer, they would never have been prepared for the Spirit’s arrival on Pentecost. If they only spent a little time here and a little time there in prayer, they may not have received the ability to speak to others in

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<sup>3</sup> Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People onto God’s Agenda*, 148.

different languages. The Spirit may have bypassed them, and those disciples would have remained in Jerusalem as useless messengers for God. Prayer might not be thrilling according to our definition, but it is the most necessary thing we must do.

**{SLIDE 5}** The disciples do the first thing were all should do when faced with tough and easy decisions: They pray. They spend the whole 10 days praying. They connect with God to figure out what they have to do next. Listen to what Henry and Richard Blackaby have to say: “God doesn’t want people to do what they think is best: [God] wants them to do what [God] knows is best... [God] must reveal it. God’s Holy Spirit reveals [God’s] will to those who are seeking [God’s] mind and [God’s] heart.”<sup>4</sup> We seek God’s mind and heart when we pray, and through such praying God lets us know what to do next.

I personally don’t think it was Peter’s invention to find another disciple. **{SLIDE 6}** I don’t think he looked at the group of 11 disciples on Day One and said, “Well, Judas is gone, so we have to replace him. Any volunteers?” On Day One Peter and the disciples and the 100 other followers of Jesus pray. And then on Day Whatever God lays the thought on Peter’s mind.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 179.

He stands up and say that they have to find the 12<sup>th</sup> disciple.<sup>5</sup> Prayer brings on this thought. If there is no prayer, there is no thought as to what God wants them to do.

And then, it isn't as though the disciples and the 100+ followers just jump at choosing a person to replace Judas. Once Peter speaks, nobody stands up and starts rattling off names. We don't have prospective candidates begin to campaign for the office of disciple, spending Super PAC money on advertisements and signs. There isn't a whole lot of uproar once Peter shares the idea that came from God. Nobody is going to do anything before they pray about it. Peter was in prayer about selecting another disciples, and so everybody will continue to be in prayer about selecting a disciple.

The names Jospheh called Barsabas and Matthias surface. Both men are good men. Both would make fine disciples. Only one can fill the spot. The process still involves prayer. Nobody is going to make any decision unless it comes from God. God "wants them to do what [God] knows is best... [God] must reveal it. God's Holy Spirit reveals [God's] will to those who are seeking [God's] mind and [God's] heart."<sup>6</sup> They pray, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Acts. 1:15-17.

<sup>6</sup> Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 179.

of these two you have chosen...”<sup>7</sup> And then they cast lots.

**{SLIDE 7}** The cartoon says, “Before Matthias is chosen as the new disciple, there were several elimination rounds using a new sophisticated high-tech selection technique.” From our viewpoint, casting lots might not be too dissimilar. We read verse 26, and think the disciples are giving up the selection to chance. Casting lots is not some magical process. It was a way people used to discern the will of God. The lots of sticks or stones took the decision out of the hands of human beings. The lots placed the decision squarely in God’s hands.<sup>8</sup> In a way, casting lots is like prayer. When we pray, we give up the need to be in control. We give all control to God to do with us as God sees fit.

So the disciples and followers didn’t use Rock, Paper, Scissors to determine who would replace Judas. They use prayer. They prayerfully consider the matter God lays before them, and Matthias is selected as the 12<sup>th</sup> disciple.

**{SLIDE 8}** Prayer is the first thing we should do in all situations. It doesn’t matter what the situation is,

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 1:24.

<sup>8</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Acts*, cf. 71.

we need to pray. We need to discover what God wants us to do. We need to figure out how to carry out what God wants us to do.

Here's a few more words from Henry and Richard Blackaby: **{SLIDE 9}** "The [Christian's] prayer is critical for several reasons... nothing of eternal significance happens apart from God. Jesus said it clearly, 'Apart from Me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). [Christians] who neglect a close relationship with Christ will be unable to accomplish God's will..."<sup>9</sup> We see it in our passage for today: the disciples need to get to Pentecost. They need to get the tongues of fire. These big things don't happen without a close relationship with Christ. And they know this. So they pray. They sustain that relationship by talking with God.

**{SLIDE 10}** "Prayer is essential because to be a spiritual leader [or person]," the Blackabys say, "one must be filled with the Holy Spirit. [Christians] cannot fill themselves with the Spirit. Only God can do that (Eph. 5:18)." Again, the disciples and followers of Christ cannot be filled with the Spirit unless they ask for it. And then, through prayer, they must be open and receptive to the arrival of the Spirit, who changes their lives forever.

**{SLIDE 11}** And the last one is that "God reveals

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<sup>9</sup> Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 148.

his agenda through prayer.”<sup>10</sup> We do not know God’s plans unless we know God and speak with God about those plans. “Jesus modeled this truth in his life.”<sup>11</sup> Before he selects the men who will be his disciples, he goes off to a quiet place to pray. Before Jesus decides whether he should stay in a particular town or not, Jesus goes off to pray. After ministry is complete with the feeding of 15,000-20,000 people, he goes off to pray.<sup>12</sup> Jesus doesn’t assume that he is the Son of God without connecting with God the Father. Various times he said, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus had a special relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit that we could never have, but we can say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in us if we are people of prayer.

If we pray with God about everything, then we know God goes with us everywhere. If we pray with God constantly, then we know what God’s agenda is for our lives. If we pray with God, then we know how to follow that agenda and give glory to God for completing it. This all happens if we pray. Prayer is the first thing, the middle thing, and the last thing we need to do.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>12</sup> The last three example may be found in Luke 6:12-16, Luke 4:42-44, and Matthew 14:22-24.

<sup>13</sup> John 14:11.

**{SLIDE 12}** Look at the disciples plus one more in Acts 1. Look at the followers of Christ surrounding the disciples, including Mary the mother of Jesus. They are a united community. They are in constant prayer for themselves and God's plan for humanity. All that ground work is established through prayer. There was no other way to do it. They connected with God, and God connected with them, and lives were transformed.

Try it out. Try out prayer. Don't be bashful. Don't be lazy. Try it. Set aside the time. Get rid of all the distractions. Be faithful to God through this great line of communication, and watch how God is faithful to us.

## **Assurance of Pardon:**

(Jeremiah 29:11-13) The good news is that God cares deeply for us, so much so that God desires to be a part of our lives, in all our daily chores, all in our future plans. God's love runs so deep, that God yearns to forgive all our sins, no matter how mild or severe they are. Believe the good news, that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.