

## Arden Pastoral Charge

May 16, 2021:

Help Wanted

Rev. Cheryl McMurray

Jesus said: "When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there."

Today we gather in Spirit, and Christ is here.



### Gathering Prayer:

Holy One, we gather together today as an act of worship.

Though we are not together in body, we are together in Spirit,  
and we gladly offer our gratitude for your Word given us.

Grant us ears to listen, minds to wonder and imagine, and courage to act.

"Holy One, open us to the possibility that we are being chosen  
to be new disciples with new ministries in Jesus' name."<sup>1</sup>

Open us to possibility that is encouraged and supported,  
and that speaks in word and deed to our faith,  
and that spreads the love of God to all.

Open to us new understandings of all we can be. Amen.

**Scripture:** Our scripture this morning comes again from the book of the Acts of the Apostles. It is the time after Jesus' resurrection, where scripture tells us that Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period of forty days. He commanded them

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<sup>1</sup> Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion, Year B, Vol 1, 180.

not to leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift God promised them – the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our scripture describes their work as they waited.

### **Reading Acts 1: 12 - 26 from the Inclusive Bible**

*The apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a mere Sabbath's walk away. Entering the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying – Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James ben-Alphaeus; Simon, a member of the zealot sect; and Judah ben-Jacob. Also in their company were some of the women who followed Jesus, his mother Mary, and some of Jesus' sisters and brothers. With one mind, they devoted themselves to constant prayer.*

*One day, Peter stood up in the midst of the believers, a gathering of perhaps a hundred and twenty. "Sisters and brothers," he said, "the saying in scripture, uttered long ago by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David, was destined to be fulfilled in Judas, the one who guided those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and had been given a share in this ministry. He bought a field with the money he received for his injustice. He collapsed there, his body burst open, and his guts poured out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about it, and the field became known as 'Akeldama,' the Field of Blood.*

*But David wrote in the book of Psalms, 'Let his encampment be desolate; may no one dwell on it.' And 'Let another take his office.'*

*It is necessary, therefore, that one of those who accompanied us all the time that Jesus moved among us, from the baptism of John until the day Jesus was taken up from us, should be named as witness with us to the Resurrection."*

*At that, they nominated two – Joseph, called Barsabbas or Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed, "O God, you can read the hearts of people. Show us which of these two you have chosen to occupy this apostolic ministry, replacing Judas, who*

*turned away and went his own way.” They then drew lots between the two. The choice fell to Matthias, who was added to the eleven apostles.*

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **Thoughts Along the Way:**

I was reading the Frontenac News from a few weeks ago, and found the most amazing ‘help wanted’ ad in the classifieds.

### **HELP WANTED**

**Position:**

Parent. Alternate job titles include: Mom, Mommy, Mama, Ma, Dad, Daddy, Dada, Da. Can also include: Gramma, Nana, Grampa, Papa.

**Job Description:**

Long term position for challenging permanent work in an often chaotic environment. Candidates must possess excellent communication and organizational skills and be willing to work variable hours, which will include evenings, weekends and frequent 24 hour shifts on call. Some overnight travel required, including trips to primitive camping sites on rainy weekends and endless sports tournaments in far away cities! Travel expenses not reimbursed. Extensive courier duties also required.

**Responsibilities:**

For the rest of your life. Must be willing to be hated, at least temporarily until someone needs \$5.00. Must be willing to bite tongue repeatedly. Also must possess the physical stamina of a pack mule and be able to go from 0 to 60 miles per hour in 3 seconds flat in case, this time, the screams from the backyard are not just someone crying wolf. Must be willing to face stimulating technical challenges such as small gadget repair, mysteriously sluggish toilets and stuck zippers. Must screen phone calls, maintain calendars and coordinate production of multiple homework projects. Must have ability to plan and organize social gatherings for clients of all ages and mental outlooks. Must be willing to be indispensable one minute, an embarrassment the next. Must handle assembly and product safety testing of a half million cheap, plastic toys and battery operated devices. Must always hope for the best but be prepared for the worst. Must assume final, complete accountability for the quality of the end product. Responsibilities also include floor maintenance and janitorial work throughout the facility.

**Possibility for Advancement and Promotion:**

None. Your job is to remain in the same position for years, without complaining, constantly retraining and updating your skills, so that those in your charge can ultimately surpass you.

**Previous Experience:**

None required. On the job training offered on a continually exhausting basis.

**Wages and Compensation:**

You pay them! Offering frequent raises and bonuses. A balloon payment is due when they turn 18 on the assumption that college will help them become financially independent. When you die, you give them whatever is left.

OK, so I didn't find it in the Frontenac News. I actually don't remember where I found it – but I used to use it when I facilitated parenting classes, and I thought it made a nice connection to Mother's Day last Sunday and Father's Day coming up in June. Did it sound comprehensive? Anything you would like to add? Anyone like to apply for the job?

It came to mind when I started to prepare the message this morning because when I read this passage from Acts, it struck me that this was a ‘help wanted’ moment. The ‘twelve’ were no more. They had been more than a team, more than colleagues. Over the past three years they had lived together, travelled together, eaten together, worked together, learned together, disagreed, fought, feared and rejoiced together. They had come from different backgrounds, had different skill sets. Nonetheless, they were the ‘twelve’. Called by Jesus to be his disciples.

*‘Come follow me,’ Jesus said to Simon, who was called Peter and his brother Andrew as they cast nets into the Sea of Galilee, for they fished by trade. ‘Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of humankind.’ They immediately abandoned their nets and began to follow Jesus. Further along the beach were a second pair of brothers – James and John. They too were in their boat, mending nets with their father when Jesus called to them, and immediately they too joined Jesus.’ (Matt 4: 18-22).*

More followed at Jesus’ call: Matthew the tax collector; Simon the zealot; brothers Jude and James; Thomas the labourer; Philip the fisherman; Bartholomew, sometimes called Nathanael the scholar; and Judas Iscariot. They were together through baptism, betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. It was because of that betrayal that the ‘twelve’ had become the ‘eleven’. They needed to be ‘twelve’ again in order to move forward, to spread the miraculous news of resurrection, the good news of Jesus Christ.

‘Twelve’ was a number significant for the Hebrews. It harkened back to the twelve tribes of Israel, named for the great grandsons of Abraham, whose descendants God had promised would number the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Restoration of the number of disciples to twelve symbolized for Jesus’ disciples, Israel’s restoration. So, Help Wanted...

The position to be filled: Disciple of our Lord and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Job description: *'To preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.'* (Luke 24: 47). Challenging work, frequent travel, variable hours. Must be willing to engage new people in new places by teaching and preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, and the Word of God. Confrontation and danger to self a real possibility.

Qualifications required: Must have been with Jesus since the time of his baptism by John to the time of his ascension. As such, must have been witness to Jesus' teaching and preaching, and acts of healing and miracles. Additional training will be provided by the advocate, the helper, the power Jesus had promised would come.

The choice of replacement was to come from those gathered; perhaps a hundred and twenty men and women. Two names were brought forward – Barsabbas, called Justus, and Matthias. Good men, both meeting the qualifications specified. How to decide? They put the decision in God's hands. They prayed: *'O God, you can read the hearts of people. Show us which of these two you have chosen to occupy this apostolic ministry.'* "They cast lots, an ancient biblical practice for determining God's will, and when the lot fell on Matthias, he was *'added to the eleven apostles.'*<sup>2</sup>

You know what else stood out for me as I read this passage? The fact that, quite obviously, there were many other men and women who had been with Jesus from the time of his baptism. They had also travelled with him. They had also heard him teach and preach, and had also watched his acts of healing and miracles. I am going to suppose that some of them supported Jesus and the disciples financially. I am going to suppose that some of them cooked for the group and some washed their clothes. I am going to suppose that some went ahead and found accommodations for the group as they passed through towns and villages. These were the ones who were often lost in the background, with the crowds. Although they also witnessed, their names and their acts of ministry, were not recorded in the gospels. Barsabbas, called Justus, and Matthias even after applying for the Help Wanted moment in this passage, fade into obscurity.

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<sup>2</sup> A. Katherine Grieb, Exegetical Perspective, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol 2, 531.

We never hear about them again. They become, as one biblical scholar writes, just two of the “hundreds of unnamed people who pass on the story of Jesus. Without those ordinary folks, Peter and Paul – the missionaries recognized as spreading the Word and Way of Christ throughout the world - would have remained quite lonely and ineffective in bearing witness *‘in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’* (Acts 1: 8).”<sup>3</sup>

It is a blessing that the letters of Peter and Paul, and Timothy and James and John are preserved for us in biblical canon, but we shouldn’t forget that those letters were written to hundreds, and thousands of Christ followers; and have been read by thousands, and millions of Christ followers, over the centuries and around the world. Those names are not recorded. But without them, that challenging work *‘to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations’* just would not have happened. “We can be grateful for the witness of those who are so little known,”<sup>4</sup> and count ourselves in good company as witnesses as well.

Oh, I left something out of that first help wanted ad – the benefit package.

**Benefits:**

While no health or dental insurance, no pension, no tuition reimbursement, no paid holidays and no stock options are offered; this job supplies limitless opportunities for personal growth, relationships that will fulfill and sustain you through the mundane and challenging days, and free hugs for life if you play your cards right.

Take a moment and think about how you would write the benefit package suitable for a disciple, an apostle of Christ. After all, you are one.... Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara K. Lunkblad, *Homiletical Perspective, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol 2*, 531.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara K. Lunkblad, *Homiletical Perspective, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol 2*, 529.

## Prayers of the People

Holy One,  
though you call us to delight in your teachings,  
to follow your commands, to love as we have been loved,  
and to be disciples sharing the good news of Christ;  
We confess that we doubt in your Word, we ignore your commands,  
we live in apathy and fear, and we turn from discipleship;

Forgive us, and restore us to you.

“Come into our hearts, and give us eyes to see  
all the ways you are made manifest this day.  
Put your resurrecting power to work in our lives  
and empower us to be witnesses to your love, and disciples for Christ,  
that our lives may be a song of thanksgiving to you.”<sup>5</sup>

Holy One,  
We pray for the needs of all during this time  
– for health, for family, for food and shelter, for financial security,  
for justice, and for equality.  
We pray for wisdom for leaders of nations.  
We pray for courage and comfort for medical staff, and for front line and essential  
service workers.  
We pray for patience as we and our communities struggle with the conditions set  
upon us because of COVID-19.  
We pray for those who are ill, in body and mind and spirit,  
and for loved ones who cannot be close enough to care for or comfort them.

We pray for all who have asked for our prayers...

We pray for all who have no one to pray for them...

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<sup>5</sup> Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year B, Vol 1, 177 (adapted CMM).



We pray especially for those near and dear to our hearts.....

“Where hope has grown tired and thin, lift our sights,  
so that we may see hope beyond hope, life beyond death,  
and you, lifted up before us.

We pray all this in the name of Christ who gave himself for our sake,”<sup>6</sup>  
To our Mother of Wisdom and our Father...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

We give thanks to God for blessings and gifts given. We, in turn, offer our gifts of time, talent and treasure to God. Your gifts can be sent to June Hughes for Arden United Church, Sheila Deline for Henderson United Church, or Sharon MacMunn for Mountain Grove United Church. You can also visit our website – [www.ardenpastoralcharge.ca](http://www.ardenpastoralcharge.ca) – where you will find a ‘Donate’ button.

On behalf of the congregations of Arden, Henderson and Mountain Grove, I do want to thank you for your ongoing financial contributions.

### **Benediction:**

“Living in the love of Christ,  
may you be open to God calling you into a new ministry.”<sup>7</sup>  
And now, may the grace of Christ attend you,  
the love of God surround you,  
and the Holy Spirit keep you. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year A, Vol 1, 103.

<sup>7</sup> Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year B, Vol 1, 181.