

## Study Guide for May 13, 2018

**Readings:** Acts 1:15-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

**Theme:** The Church Is Now Open For Business.

This weeks mark the seventh and final Sunday of Easter. Next week will enter the season of Pentecost; which begins with the Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples and the new followers of Christ and empowering the new global mission of the church to share the Good News of Jesus. During the 40 days between Easter and the Ascension of Christ, the Disciples become emboldened and fearless, thanks in part to the visitations of Jesus. But now it's their (and our) turn to receive the Spirit and put on the flesh of Jesus, to become the Body of Christ...the hands and feet of Jesus.

Jesus invites each one of us to be a part of this new community, in the many forms that it will take, and to reflects God's sustaining love, power and presence in the world. Before his assassination, Martin Luther King reminded us that a church is not a place we go to, but a place from which we go. And the community in which we gather in Christ name is the medium in which the Gospel can happen. It's an engine for peace, and fuel for justice.

In these readings you will discover some key ingredients what makes up the this new community that we call the Body of Christ. They include, the Holy Spirit, Testimony, and Prayer. First of all we can't do it alone, so God empowered us with the Spirit. Second, we have to bear witness to this power and to the uniqueness of this God that is fundamentally different than any other god. Lastly, we must always stay in communication with God through prayer.

### **Read: Acts 1:15-26**

How do you choose a church? How do you select a group of people to associate with? Do we pick them, or do they pick us? Do we roll the dice and hope that's the right one? Or do we draw a number out of a hat? The disciples, of course, were called by Jesus himself. But now they have to find a replacement for Judas, and so they do what they have witnessed to work. They pray. "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one..."

Today's reading from Acts gives us a practical example to an extremely practical problem; there was work to be done, and someone needed to be appointed to do it. While casting lots may not be the most popular method of discernment nowadays, it certainly demonstrates that the 11 had a great deal of trust in God's plan and care, even in the most uncertain of times. May it be so for us, too.

**Q:** How is God nudging you to use our gifts in the service of the Gospel?

**Q:** What word or phrase has the Holy Spirit moved you to focus on?

**Prayer:** Lord God, you know everyone's heart, which means you know mine. Show me how to live with a heart of love and justice in my community today. Amen.

**Read: 1 John 5:9-13**

In the first three verses of this passage the word “testimony” appears six times. The powerful theme of testimony or witness that makes up this text can be seen as the seed that has been planted in the heart of each one of us, which is now beginning to grow. The text explores testimony in two critical dimensions: the relationship of God’s testimony to human witness, and the content of God’s testimony. Both offer us another perspective on the incarnational reality of the gospel. God’s willingness to be humbled and made low is hard to imagine to those who do not know the gospel. After all, why would God chose to live in the same space that we dwell?

**Q:** How is God nudging you to show your faith and testify to God’s love that has been given to us through Jesus Christ?

**Q:** What word or phrase has the Holy Spirit moved you to focus on?

**Prayer:** Lord God, thank you for coming to be with me and making me a part of your story. In all that I do, may I always bear witness to your abundant love and steadfast faith, and the gift of grace that is given to all your children through Christ Jesus, Amen.

**John 17:6-19 (I would suggest reading the whole chapter)**

Today’s Gospel lesson comes in the middle of a series of prayers that Jesus offers. If you read the whole chapter you will see why this prayer is traditionally divided into four categories: Christ prays for himself; Christ prays for the Disciples; Christ prays for the Church; Christ prays for all.

Today’s portion forms the entirety of the second category, Christ prays for the Disciples. It goes without saying that God’s love has no limits, and that Christ loves every corner of creation. At the same time, however, we know that the Incarnation happened for very specific reasons, and with very specific means. As such, this prayer contains a clear divide, as Jesus juxtaposes himself and the disciples with the world (the portion of humanity that chooses darkness over light, directly opposing the will of God). Our greatest honor—and perhaps our greatest challenge—is to bear the light of Christ when we are so often surrounded by darkness. We cannot do it alone, just as the disciples could not do it alone; Jesus prayed for them and entrusted them with the very risky and transformative ministry that has endured for nearly two thousand years.

**Q:** How is God nudging you to respond to darkness that is in your community?

**Q:** What word or phrase has the Holy Spirit moved you to focus on?

**Prayer:** Here my prayers, O Lord my God, and bless my words for your glory. Amen.

**Slow Read: Psalm 1**

Focus your breathing and meditation on these words, and try to see yourself through God’s lens – delighting with happiness and joy as you live out your life in righteousness.