

Who Will Be the Next Apostolic Idol?

May 28, 2006

(Easter 7 - Year B)

Acts 1: 15-26

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Last Wednesday night, over 35 million people in the United States watched the finale of American Idol on TV.

Over 63 million votes were cast, via text messages, for either Taylor Hicks or Katharine McPhee to be the next American Idol.

Those 63 million votes are more votes than have ever been cast in any U.S. Presidential election.

Which certainly tells you something about our national priorities, doesn't it?

Well, in the end, 35 million Americans watched on TV to see Taylor Hicks win over Katharine McPhee.

And, now, Taylor Hicks is our newest American Idol.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read this morning that lots were cast, rather than text messages, to see who would be the next Apostolic Idol.

Lots were cast between a man named Matthias and another man, Joseph Barsabbas, also known as Justus, to see who would become the 12th Apostle, since Judas was now out of the picture.

Scripture says:

“The lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles.”

Yet, I wonder:

What ever happened to Joseph Barsabbas, the man also known as Justus?

What ever happened to the man who lost the contest to be the Apostle to replace Judas?

We all know what happens to winners.

The lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles, to make them an even number of twelve apostles once again. And today, Matthias now has his name embroidered on kneeling cushions at altar rails all around the world. Matthias even has his own feast day in the church calendar, February 24, when he is remembered throughout the Christian Church as the twelfth apostle, the winner of the Apostolic Idol contest.

But, what ever happened to the man known as Justus,
The man who lost the contest to be the Apostle to replace Judas?

Both Matthias and Justus were well-qualified to be the next Apostle. Both Mathias and Justus had met the criteria: Both men had been with Jesus from the time of Jesus' Baptism until his Ascension. Both Matthias and Justus had been witnesses of the Resurrection. But, in a contest similar to Drawing Straws or Rock, Paper, Scissors, The lot fell on Matthias, and *he* was the man added to the eleven apostles.

Yet, I believe that God had other plans for Justus, plans that are not in the Bible.

Because, I believe that God has a plan and a future for each one of us.¹ And, that plan does not always mean that we get to be the winner, the American Idol, or the twelfth apostle.

But, God has a plan for each of us,
A plan which is better than the plans we can make for ourselves.

When I was in seminary, I was very involved as a student leader in student government.

I participated with the Dean and the faculty in making decisions for the school.

And, as I was entering my senior year, several students approached me, telling me that I should run for Senior Class President.

I certainly was well-qualified.

¹ See Jeremiah 29:11

And, I did meet the criteria to be the Senior Class President.
So, I placed my name into the election.

At that time, I was serving in a parish in Woodbridge, Virginia.
And, I was leading a men's Bible study at that parish on Saturday mornings.

On the Saturday morning before the Senior Class election,
The Bible study group was taking prayer requests.
So, I told the group of men about the election, and they all agreed that they would pray for me.
So, one of the men led us in prayer.

This man prayed:

“O God, be with Jeff and the Virginia Seminary community as they gather to elect a leader.

Lord, we pray that God's will be done, and that the students elect the leader whom you, Lord, have chosen.”

I opened my eyes and my head bobbed up in a small state of panic:
No, no, no.

I thought:

That was not the right prayer!

The prayer was supposed to be:

“Please, Lord, make Jeff the Senior Class President!”

But, darn it, that man prayed that God's will be done.

He prayed the wrong prayer!

In my heart, as I heard that prayer, I knew then that I would lose the election.

And, sure enough, just like Katharine McPhee, who lost the contest to be the next American Idol,

Just like Justus, who lost the contest to be the next Apostolic Idol,

I lost the election for Senior Class President.

But, God has plans for those who are witnesses to the resurrection.

God has plans for those who lose contests and elections and who draw the shortest straw.

Several weeks after the election, the Dean of Virginia Seminary called me into her office.

She was appointing me to take on the responsibility for a series of Community Forums during my senior year.

These forums addressed issues of biblical authority, of church polity and of human sexuality, in the wake of the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

I was to put together panels of brilliant professors and moderate the discussions.

I did not have the title of Senior Class President during my senior year, but I was the Forum Moderator, sitting on the stage each week, moderating challenging and amazing discussions among theological giants.

My gifts and talents were used in a much more meaningful way than they ever would have been if I had won the election.

For, you see, God has plans for those who lose contests and who draw the shortest straw.

Maybe you, also, have felt like Joseph Barsabbas, called Justus.

Maybe you, also, have felt like the lot has not fallen upon you, but upon someone else,

Like you keep drawing the shortest straw,

Like you are a loser.

But, the Christian faith proclaims that there is always new hope.

For, the Cross of Jesus is a message that when all seems hopeless and lost,

Then God has other plans.

God is a God of resurrection and of hope and of plans for a new future.²

Sometimes we pray that God will just rubber stamp our own plans,

Sometimes we pray that God will make us the winner.

But instead, we should pray that *God's will*, not our own will, be done.

² See Jeremiah 29:11

For God's "power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine."³

In the Acts of the Apostles,
The early Christians gathered together,
Not to count text messages or to crown the next American Idol.
But, the early Christians gathered together and proposed two men to take
Judas' place:
Justus and Matthias.

Then, they prayed and said:
"Lord, you know everyone's heart.
Show us which one of these two [men] you have chosen to take the
place in this ministry..."
And the lot fell on Matthias.

God had plans for Matthias.
God had plans for Justus.
And, God has plans for you.

So, pray and listen.
Pray that *God's will*,
Not *your will*,
Be done.

AMEN.

© The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, 2006

³ From Ephesians 3:20