

When the apostles went with another candidate

While the apostles welcome Matthias into his new role, I want to sit with Barsabbas, the one who was rejected.

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I was having coffee with a friend, discussing the strange ritual of applying to jobs online. She has been looking for a teaching position with a livable salary; I am hoping to transition away from overnight shifts as a hospital chaplain. The job search involves daily rejection. As so many of us seek meaningful work to no avail, there's a cumulative toll to not being chosen.

For both my friend and me, the process has been difficult. It is not easy to receive a response from prospective employers. Sometimes, after uploading her resume and cover letter, my friend cannot bring herself to hit the submit icon. "Sometimes, I have to ask my husband to do it for me," she said. "I simply can't!"

As I headed home, I began to think about our underlying fears. In one sense, a resume serves as a snapshot of our aspirations and investments, our struggles and commitments. It is a history of our longings and our places, our people and our hopes. It is one way of understanding the past and orienting ourselves toward an imagined future. Crafting a resume is an exercise in vulnerability. In applying for jobs, we send vulnerable, cherished, hard-won parts of ourselves out into the world. We do not know if these parts of ourselves will be received with care.

In the first chapter of Acts, the early church searches for a proper replacement for Judas. And in many ways, they undergo an admirable and ethical process. Both candidates, Barsabbas and Matthias, have been faithful members of the early church. They have traveled with Jesus throughout his ministry and participated in sharing his good news. In short, the prospective leaders of the community are drawn

from within the community. Authority is not imposed from without.

Likewise, the process is transparent. Peter does not remove himself from the community to make a decision privately. The process does not occur behind closed doors. Rather, it takes place in public alongside other members.

Finally, Peter and the other disciples are intentionally open to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. In praying for God's guidance, Peter demonstrates an appropriate level of humility. With these provisions in place, I imagine the joy and sense of fulfillment that community experienced when Matthias picked up the chosen lot.

Yet I am drawn to Barsabbas. The text implies that he is a good and worthy choice. He too has been faithful and has contributed to the care of the community. The text does not mention anything to his discredit. Ultimately, we are not told why he is not chosen. When I read this passage in Acts, I wonder about Barsabbas, the good yet rejected one.

As Christians, we trust in a God who makes a specific, loving covenant with the Jewish people, while also expanding that covenant to include all people. For many Christians, scripture chronicles this expansive, loving embrace. It witnesses to God's passion for choosing each of us, over and over again. It demonstrates how God never tires of that tender and enduring choice.

Sometimes, I find this affirmation comforting. At other times, it remains abstract. In times like those, my mind drifts to Barsabbas. I want to sit with him while others celebrate and welcome Matthias into his new role.

I wonder about what happens next in Barsabbas' story, how he copes with the disappointment, and how he continues to use his gifts in service of the gospel. I wonder also about the resumes that lie unnoticed in inboxes, the ones that were good, yet somehow rejected. I wonder what comes next.