

I. Introduction

Good morning! This painting of the Last Supper by Leonardo Da Vinci shows Jesus and the disciples sharing a meal in a spacious room on the second floor of a house. It is a pleasant scene, but later that night, the faith of the disciples was severely tested. After supper, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was arrested. That night, all of the disciples despaired and none openly stood with Jesus. Peter, for example, went from boldness to weeping in a few short hours. And, on the next day, the crucifixion of Jesus left the disciples defeated and without hope.



After that, this upper room seems to have become a temporary lodging for the disciples and it is the place where most of the disciples first met Jesus after His resurrection. Take a look at **John 20:19-20**, “**On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**”

Take a look also at **John 20:26-28**. “**A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” 28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**” The faith of the disciples was severely damaged when Jesus was crucified, but after Jesus rose from the grave, their faith was restored by His presence in the upper room.

The idea of the, “upper room,” has become a symbol of Christian faith and fellowship. And, if you visit Jerusalem and take a tour, the upper room will probably be one of the sites on the tour. The building that is there now was not built until about the 12th century, but based on archeological and historical evidence, many scholars believe that the location is indeed the original site of the upper room.



Last week, we read about how Jesus returned to the Father in heaven after appearing to His disciples many times over a 40 day period after His resurrection. Before He left, Jesus told the disciples to return to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father; the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. In today’s passage, we will see that the disciples returned again to the upper room and devoted themselves to prayer as they waited. Let’s read Acts 1:12-26.

II. Scripture Reading Acts 1:12-26, NIV 1984

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. 15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus-- 17 he was one of our number and shared in this ministry." 18 (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. 19 Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language

Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, "'May another take his place of leadership.' 21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." 23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen 25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." 26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

III. Teaching

In obedience to Jesus' command, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and waited for the promise of the Father. Altogether, about 120 people were there in the upper room. The group included the eleven remaining apostles, Mary, the mother of Jesus and His brothers, and other women and more disciples.

While they were there, waiting and praying, Peter stood up among them and led what can be described as the first business meeting in church history. Using quotations from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8, Peter reviewed the facts about Judas Iscariot's betrayal of the Lord and showed that it was necessary for someone to take Judas' place so that the leadership of the 12 would be complete again. Peter then stated the qualifications for the position, and after this, the group put two men forward and the final decision to choose Matthias was made by casting lots.



Matthias was added to the number of the apostles and once again the group of 12 leaders was whole. Some people have criticized the disciples for choosing Matthias in this way, but I see no real basis for that criticism. The disciples prayed together, they studied Scripture, they consulted as a group, and they asked the Lord to make the final choice. In Scripture, Matthias is not mentioned by name after this, but according to church tradition, he went on to preach the gospel in numerous places, including in Colchis, Georgia, before becoming a martyr by stoning and beheading.



According to church tradition and history, all but one of the apostles became martyrs for their faith. Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross in Edessa, Greece. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. James, son of Alphaeus was stoned in Jerusalem. Thomas died in India, thrust through by a spear. Bartholomew, Philip, and Simon the Zealot were also crucified. Acts 12:2 records that James, son of Zebedee was killed by sword; he was the first apostle to die for his faith; Judas, son of James was stoned. Like Thomas, Matthew died by being thrust through with a spear. Of all of the apostles, only John died a peaceful death; he came close to becoming a martyr, but was spared and lived to be an elderly man, finally dying as an exile in Ephesus in about 100 AD.



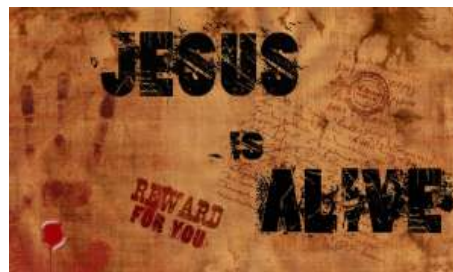
The stories of the deaths of the apostles come from church tradition and it is possible that the records contain some errors. But even allowing for the possibility of some errors, it is clear that all of the apostles dedicated their lives to preaching the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus. Even in the face of threats and violence, all of them declared that Jesus is alive and all were willing to die for their faith.

Many skeptics question the resurrection of Jesus, but the faithful testimony of the apostles destroys the arguments of the skeptics. Think about it. If Jesus had not died on the cross and risen from the grave, why would the apostles constantly and publicly proclaim the resurrection? There was no earthly profit or advantage to gain by claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. The Jewish leaders and the Roman

government both pursued Christians who preached the resurrection and killed them. To proclaim the living Jesus almost guaranteed that you would be marked for death, hunted down, and killed.

The only earthly reward preachers of the gospel could expect was imprisonment and death. But in the face of all this opposition, what did the apostles do? Every one of them constantly proclaimed that Jesus was alive! The only explanation for their behavior is that they knew for sure that Jesus had risen from the dead and that they were certain that the heavenly reward of preaching the Good News was far greater than any earthly suffering. To suffer and die for Jesus was counted as the highest honor. This makes sense only if they knew absolutely that Jesus lived and that He would welcome them into heaven when they died.

In my own journey of faith, the testimony of the apostles, and of all those early Christians who died as martyrs, has been very important. When I was first learning about Jesus, I focused first on the Bible and then on some other historical sources about Jesus. But at some point I became aware of the amazing testimony of the apostles. They gave their lives testifying to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. They had no reason to lie, and it was impossible for them to all be mistaken or deceived.



Their faith had a big impact on me and I made the choice to believe their testimony. That was a huge step for me, but since then I have found more and more proof that Jesus is alive, including my own personal experiences with the living Lord. Now I can proclaim with confidence, Jesus is alive! Today, and every day, let's join with the apostles in proclaiming that Jesus is alive. We serve a living Lord! Amen!

So what should we do? Well, we know what they did. After Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, they joined together in fellowship and united prayer. **Acts 1:14** says, **“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”** Consider this verse carefully. Who was praying? All of them. When were they praying? Constantly. How were they praying? Joined together. **“They all joined together constantly in prayer.”**

Brothers and sisters, we need to learn how to do this. We need to learn how to spend time together in prayer. We need to cry out to the Lord, “Lord, teach us to pray!” As we continue our study in Acts, I am going to be inviting you to some special opportunities for praying together, and I hope that you will participate. Group prayer does not replace individual prayer, but praying together is very important, and, my desire is that we will really learn how to pray together.



In prayer, we can learn how to walk with the Lord and trust in Him in all circumstances. In today's passage, we saw how the disciples dealt with the loss of Judas Iscariot. Judas' betrayal and subsequent suicide must have been very painful for the disciples. After all, they had spent three years together with Judas. But praying together and studying the Scriptures, they made the decision to give Judas' place to another and they left Judas and his actions in the hands of God.

By the way, the descriptions of Judas' death here and in the gospels are different, but they are compatible. **Acts 1:18** says, **“With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.”** On the other hand, the gospel account in Matthew 27:5 says Judas returned the money to the priests and went and hung himself.



Critics claim that differences like this are contradictions in Scripture; but a few minutes thought will show that the descriptions are compatible. In fact, what the differences really prove is that the accounts are written by independent witnesses who are each telling the story their own way. This is strong evidence for the truth of the accounts, since it shows that there was no conspiracy or effort to edit the accounts to make them the same. Concerning

Judas' death, if we can say that Judas bought the field indirectly through the priests, and we can consider that Judas hung himself, but that later the rope broke and he fell and was split open, then there is no contradiction at all. Matthew described the events that occurred at the time, but Acts describes only the final result.

I have talked a little about the strong witness of the faith of the apostles in their lives and deaths, but we can also see the beginnings of that faith in today's passage. **Acts 1:4** told us, **"On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.""** The disciples had already been told that their mission was to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. But first, they were to wait for the Holy Spirit. In today's passage, we see the disciples gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem praying and waiting. That is obedience. While they waited, they prayed and turned to the scriptures for guidance. Obedience, prayer, fellowship, and Bible study, these things show their faith. After Jesus' death, the faith of the disciples disappeared, but after they met the risen Lord, their faith was restored. And, when the Holy Spirit comes in power in Acts 2, we will see their faith explode into action as they boldly testify to all that Jesus is alive.

Faith is essential to the Christian life. As **Hebrews 11:6** tells us, **"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."** The apostles believed. They had strong faith because they knew without doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead because they saw Him, talked with Him, touched Him, and ate with Him.

To see the risen Lord Jesus was a tremendous blessing, but what did Jesus say? **John 20:28-29**, **"Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.""** Did you ever notice this? The blessing we receive when we believe without seeing Jesus is even greater than the blessing the apostles had when they saw the risen Lord. That's pretty amazing!

We do not see Jesus with our eyes, but we are not left without evidence for our faith. We have the testimony of the apostles and the testimony of millions of fellow believers. And, we have the written testimony of the Scriptures. In John, the next verses are **John 20:30-31**. **"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."** The things in the Bible are written there so that we may believe in Jesus and receive eternal life in His Name. The Bible is God's love letter to us. Read it. You will be blessed. Read it and pray about the things you read, and faith will grow in your heart more and more day by day.

IV. Conclusion

Let's close with a few words from Isaiah 40:28-31. Listen to what Isaiah says, I am sure you will be blessed.

Isaiah 40:28-31, "28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Let's pray.

V. Prayer