

Never Tell me the Odds

Everything changes, and nothing stands still...at least that's what Heraclitus thought. A Greek philosopher from the 6th Century BCE, he built an entire philosophy around this very idea...that we can't escape change...that everything flows, everything moves...nothing remains the same. Maybe you've heard it put this way: "You can't stand in the same river twice." Yeah, that was Heraclitus too. Try as hard as we might...we simply are not in control of the ebbs and flows of life. Everything changes, and nothing stands still. Certainly we can make plans, and sometimes our plans actually come to fruition. But is any one of your lives exactly as you dreamed it would be...exactly as you imagined it as a child? I'm willing to wager all the money in your wallets that your life hasn't turned out as you thought it would. Sometimes the changes work for our good. And sometimes, unfortunately, they feel more like a foul than fortune. But such is life. Everything changes, and nothing stands still.

Certainly, this is the experience the Apostles had with Jesus. A teacher whose teachings they could never nail down. A Messiah whose messianic actions didn't line up with their hopes and dreams of a new king like David or Solomon. Living, dying, rising, ascending...he never stood still. He was always on the move. And this kind of uncertainty, this kind of transition, continued in the age after his ascension. *Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus-- for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us-- one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.* They had lived with Judas, walked those

dusty roads of ministry with him. When the Last Supper came around, they simply couldn't fathom that one of the trusted Twelve would betray the Lord. Alas, one did. And his betrayal and death left a gaping hole in their fellowship that needed to be filled. Everything changes, and nothing stands still.

And stand still they didn't. They understood that one who had seen the Lord and walked with their company needed to take the place of Judas. And so, like good, pious, God-fearing folk, they entered into a deep trance, connected mentally and spiritually through prayer and meditation, to discern the specific man God was calling to join their fellowship. Oh...wait. I think I got those details wrong. Ah yes. They prayed, and then they rolled the dice to see who the lucky one was. *Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and Apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.*" And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven Apostles. I absolutely *love* this story. The saints of old casting lots, taking a chance, playing the odds to determine who would be the next apostle. Frankly, this approach would be an infinitely more cost-effective way to find our new bishops, but I digress. You see, the Apostles knew something we so easily forget: our God is a God of Transitions and New Beginnings. When everything is changing, when all that we once hoped for is going the way of fantasy, when we are at a loss for solutions...God is there, present with us, nurturing us, speaking to us through even the most mundane things. Heraclitus had most of it right. Everything changes, and nothing stands still. He simply forgot to add, "Nothing except the abiding presence of God."

The God of the Apostles, the God made flesh in Jesus, is not only a God of the past...a God of memory, calling us to look backward to a gilded age of safety and stability. History

alone would prove that idea wrong. Our God is One who opens up the possibilities of the future right here in the present. And we who relate to this God...well, we must learn to trust that which we cannot see, that which we cannot touch, that which we cannot control. The transition the Apostles found themselves in was fairly mundane. A choice between two worthy men to take his place among them. Your transition may not be as mundane. Perhaps you are struggling to discern your identity...who you are, what your purpose is, what kind of person you need to become. Perhaps you're facing the transitions of aging, learning to relate to your body in new ways, being forced to reckon with your mortality in starkly confrontational ways. Or, maybe you are one of the many who are graduating into a new phase of life, unsure of what this new phase will bring. In all these things, God is present. Living faithfully in the midst of these transitions doesn't mean that you must wait for a voice from on high to dictate your next steps. It means that you must trust that in whatever choices you make, God is present...abiding within you, dwelling within you, nurturing your mind and heart. "Never tell me the odds," once said the famous Correllian philosopher, Han Solo, convinced that there is nothing to fear in uncertainty. The Apostles knew this too when they played the odds, firm in their belief that God was with them. So, roll the dice. Cast the lots. Play the odds. Act, don't wait, for everything changes, and nothing stands still. Trust that the same God who watched over St. Matthias is watching over you.