

How Do We Decide?

I am sure that everyone here has some recollection of childhood games. Maybe you played “Hide and Seek” or “Kick the Can” when you were growing up. I grew up in a neighborhood that had 27 kids in just six homes. Subsequently, we had our own games such as “Dirty Face Man” or “Chinese School.” There were also jump rope games where you had to decide who would be the twirler and who would get “first end off.” We had various ways that it was decided to figure out who was “it” or who had to turn the rope first. What do you remember? Take a moment and think about it. Now, if you’re comfortable, turn to someone or get up and move and share with someone. You have two minutes to share. Our two minutes are up; is there anyone who would like to share with the group?

In some ways, the games or methods we used were no different from “casting lots.” Casting lots was used in over 40 instances in the Old Testament and 7 in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, they’d cast lots to see which of the Israelites would receive what tract of land in the Promised Land, to decide who had angered God in the book of

Jonah, as well as various jobs and functions in the Temple. It would not come as a surprise that the Apostles would use this method when choosing between two qualified disciples to fill the role of Apostle. Both Justus and Matthias were good men probably among the 70 Jesus sent out to preach. They intended to leave it up to God to choose and they believed that casting lots was the proper way to do that.

Today, our version of casting lots is flipping a coin or rolling the dice. Now, a coin toss is used before football games and, in big games, done with great ceremony. This is fine for a sporting event but do we leave our important decisions to a coin toss? When you were looking for a pastor the Search Committee did not say “heads—Paul Nesbit, tails—Candidate A.” A great deal of prayer and discussion were involved in this process. When you go into a polling booth you do not toss a coin or roll dice to see which candidate you choose based on God’s will.

We learned at an early age how to make decisions. Our parents and teachers laid the groundwork to help us. We could choose to behave or not, do our chores or not, follow our curfew or not. Of course, we knew that if we made the correct choices, i.e., behave, do our chores,

and follow the curfew, we would not be subjected to consequences. We were given more privileges when we demonstrated that we could be good citizens. We did not have to cast lots to figure this out.

We do not look with disdain on the Apostles for casting lots for this is what they knew. Again, they had two fine representatives in Justus and Matthias. The descent of the Holy Spirit, also known as Pentecost, had not yet happened. I would like to point out that nowhere in the Bible does it tell us that we should cast lots to help us decide. What do we have instead? We have our Sacred Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and prayer to help us decide. Whenever I am in a committee meeting and asked to offer a prayer, I always call upon the Holy Spirit to be with us to serve as a guide so that all we do, all that we are, and all that we say will be done for the glory of God.

Next week is Pentecost and we will commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. It is also considered the birthday of the Church. The Holy Spirit is certainly at work in both of our churches as we pray, minister, and play together. We are going to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to be with us as we make decisions about our

churches and how we can continue to minister to everyone who comes through our doors. We name what is idealistic but realistic for us to sustain our ministerial presence here in the “greater Southwick/Westfield area.” How can we ensure that all that we say, all that we do, and all that we are as Christian members of First Congregational Church of Westfield and Southwick Congregational Church will be for the greater glory of God as well as bringing God’s reign to fruition in our area?

I don’t think we will cast lots, throw dice, or put our potatoes in to see what we will do. Together, let us pray, engage in meaningful conversation, and rely on the Holy Spirit to work through us to do so.

Amen and Amen!