

**What's the difference between a disciple and an apostle?** That's the question our first lesson today raises for me. Our lesson tells how Jesus' original disciples selected a successor for Judas Iscariot to serve with them as apostles.

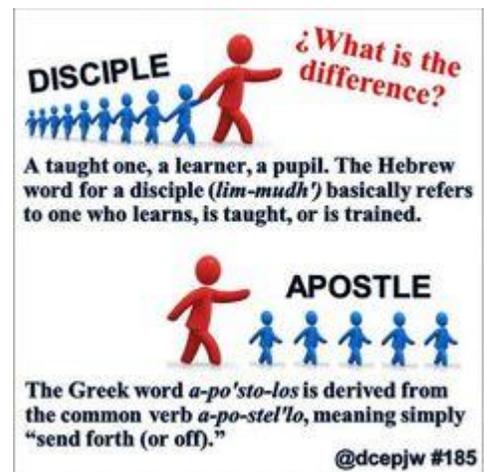
- First, Peter decided that 12 disciples were needed to be apostles to tell the whole world about Christ Jesus. After all, Jesus had selected 12 to be in his inner circle and there had been 12 tribes of Israel, making 12 the number associated with completeness. So, a 12<sup>th</sup> apostle was needed.
- Second, Peter named the selection criteria. The 12<sup>th</sup> apostle had to have been with Jesus throughout his entire three-year ministry and so be a witness to the resurrection. He apparently also assumed the new apostle had to be male, given the culture of the time.
- Third, the disciples, which is to say the 120 Christ-followers present, identified the two among them who met these selection criteria.
- Fourth, the disciples prayed that God would reveal God's choice.
- And finally, probably using the Jewish Temple custom of their day, they cast lots to discover who God had chosen.

Did you notice the difference between an apostle and a disciple? In this original sense of the role, an apostle is an envoy, an ambassador, a disciple with a specialized mission of telling the world about Christ Jesus. On the other hand, a disciple is anyone who believes in and is a student of Christ Jesus. All apostles were disciples, but not all disciples were apostles.

Some have argued that Matthias failed as an apostle. They point to the lack of any further reference to him in scripture. They suggest that Peter had been too hasty, that Peter should have waited for the Holy Spirit to recruit Paul.

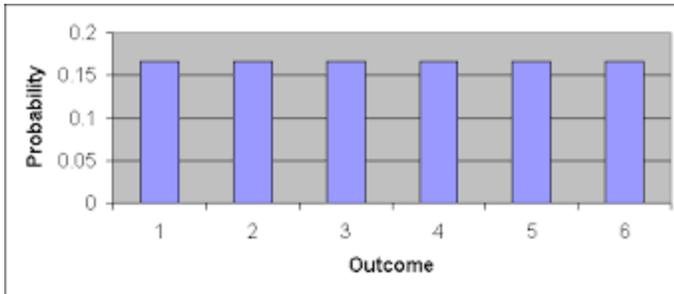
Others use the lack of further information about Matthias to argue the opposite. They also point to **much later** Greek tradition that says Matthias evangelized in foreign lands (in Cappadocia and in regions bordering the Caspian Sea) and was martyred for his faith in present day Ethiopia, where he was stoned, and then beheaded.

We just don't know the outcome, though. Where WE present-day disciples get "hung up" is in the part about casting lots. Perhaps we mentally scoff at the quaintness, the naivete, the ignorance of those



who believed that we can cast lots or roll the dice to reveal what God wants us to do. So, I ask you, “Can we discern God’s will by chance, by lot?”

I say yes, we CAN discern God’s will by lot, if we are willing to cede control to God, pray that God will reveal his will in this way, and live in faith with the results. I note with a broad grin, though, that if we at Resurrection really believed this, we would only need to draw four names instead of 50 each year when we select our new Vestry class by lot.



I know. YOU probably are thinking about statistics. You would remind me there is a statistical probability, a random chance, of any outcome, unless someone has rigged the process. And it is OK to say “no” to selection by random chance.

But any science, such as statistics, can only tell us how things work as a general rule, how things work over time. Neither statistics nor science can account for singularities, how something uniquely varies from the norm. We disciples call these unique occurrences by another name, by the way; we call them “miracles.” These are times when God disrupts the very rules he established for ordering our world when he created all things.

I know. You’re going to say, “Sure God CAN use lot-casting to reveal his choice, but DOES God act in this way?” I’d argue that God would, if those drawing lots, those casting the dice, pray that God reveal his choice in this way and act accordingly.

This is like the concept that “your faith will heal you.” But don’t forget to include prayer along with your deep belief in the outcome! I say this because I have experienced how someone grows into a new mission, a new role, God has given them. At first the new role is like an ill-fitting suit. But over time, with prayer and faith of the person and the community, the “suit” fits better and better until it is like skin. Perhaps you, also, have experienced this.

I’ll bet Matthias experienced this “mission fit” as he grew into the role of apostle that God had selected for him. Knowing that God had chosen him and nurtured by a community that believed in his call, Matthias would have been sent as ambassador for Christ and became foundational in creating the Church. The Holy Spirit would have given him everything needed for him to accomplish his mission as apostle.

However, I think that Joseph the Just also experienced his own “mission fit” as he grew in the role that God had given him: disciple, someone who believes in Christ Jesus and learns and grows in the knowledge and love of God as he lives a life of Christ Jesus.

We don’t cast lots today to determine our role: apostle or disciple. We work at being disciples and wait for God to appoint someone else to evangelize about Christ. Or we assume the role of apostle is closed or radically changed—a subject I’ll reserve for another day.

For today, though, I’ll end with this thought. Clement of Alexandria, who was born 60 years after the Book of Acts was written, wrote that the apostle Matthias frequently said, “If the neighbor of [a disciple] sins, the [disciple] sins. For if he had led himself as the word [that is, as scripture] dictates, the neighbor would have been in awe of his life so that he did not sin.” (*Stromata* 7.13.82.1)

This is startling, a huge responsibility. We all are to be disciples—to live Jesus’ teaching so convincingly that we are responsible for others accepting Christ.