Sermon for Monday February 25, 2013
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Today we honor the Apostle who is added to the team. Unlike the extraordinary process we all went through, the process for St. Matthias was much more simple. He was one of two raised up as a possible replacement for Judas. And through the casting of lots, the Holy Spirit chose St. Matthias. And this is all we know – this one fact is it: namely, through the casting of lots the Lord revealed a man whose ‘heart’ was appropriate for the ministry of an apostle.

So what does it mean to have an appropriate heart? In Philippians, we have a contrast drawn. A contrast between those fixated on the immediate – ‘their god is their belly; and their glory is in their shame’ and those whose minds are set up upon heaven with all the promise and hope that involves. Lent is a good moment to recognize that we tussle in between these two worlds. Lent is a good moment to recognize we are
constantly invited to transcend the immediate and move to the eternal perspective.

Of the many areas of tussle – materialism, gluttony, sexual attraction, just for a moment, in this healing service, I want us to acknowledge the ways in which alcohol can be an area of tussle. It is a legally permitted drug in the Commonwealth of Virginia; and the Episcopal Church does not have the same history of nervousness that some of our more reformed brothers and sisters have. Our Lord did after all produce forty gallons of wine at Canaan; so we don’t think it is intrinsically incompatible with the Gospel, but we can still learn from our Reformed friends. It is important to recognize that there are dangers embedded in the cocktail in 1823 or the party back at the dorm.

Alcohol changes dynamics. It is so easy to pass from enjoyable banter to uncomfortable behavior; it is so easy to find oneself needing a drink to cope with this or that; it is so easy to create a habit that in a very real sense hinders ourselves from the
hope of the Gospel; it is so tragically possible that we turn from social drinkers to addicts.

And for some in our community, they have already been through and hit bottom in the cycle of pain. We are all broken; and for some, alcohol has been a central aspect to their recognition of brokenness. So how should this community handle the reality of alcohol?

We handle it by inviting everyone to recognize the dangers and to live sensitive to those who are recovering. Not everyone will be able to be in 1823, but as a community, we will continue to strive to make 1823 a place safe for those who are recovering by having a beautiful display of non-alcoholic options. We remind our community of the appropriate number of units that are healthy and that three ‘no alcohol days’ a week lets your liver recover. We insist that no one should ever drink and drive. And we invite every member of the community to create occasions where we have fun and don’t have alcohol.

Food isn’t in itself bad, but gluttony is; buying nice stuff isn’t in itself bad, but materialism is; alcohol in itself is not bad, but
drunkenness is. Human ingenuity is such that everything good can be misused. In our tussle we resist the urge to misuse and allow all these things to be framed by our commitment to a kingdom where everything is good and nothing is misused.

We are citizens of heaven. We are striving to bring a little bit of heaven on earth. And we start with our lives and our own patterns of behavior. Let us offer all this to God.