

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 1:6-14

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. 13 When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

This is the word of the Lord. THANKS BE TO GOD

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING: John 17:1-11

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

6 “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

“Are We There Yet?”

Rev. Kristin-Adkins-Whitesides reminded me this week of something that has happened to so Mike and I too...that is...hearing our children ask the dreaded question when we just begun a journey of some kind. We'd packed our bags, packed the cooler with snacks and the game bag with travel toys, pillows, blankets, everything we needed. We'd loaded all of it and the kids in the car and excitedly started off on a long-awaited vacation. Yet with all of this, the questions very soon began...first, “*Can we have a snack?*” “*Can we listen to our CDs?*” “*Will you tell him to quit touching me?*” And then...the most dreaded one... “*Are we there yet?*” Initially, maybe it was sort of funny, but after the 10th time and we still weren't but a couple hours from home, it became a bit irritating. Yes, it's a hard lesson to learn that “*you can't skip the miles in between one place and another. The only way to get where you're headed is to just go through what's in between.*”¹

In our text from Acts today, Jesus was asked something very similar by his disciples. It must have been a bit irritating for him since it was with them that he'd shared the previous 3 years. They'd witnessed his teaching and preaching, his healing miracles, and they'd eaten with him at table. They'd seen him elevate the position of women and children, include those who were otherwise excluded, and push back against the corrupt religious leaders of the time. They'd seen him turn the world upside down. Yet still, they did not understand that he came for a bigger time and broader audience than just them, than just Israel, than all that they could see out the windows of their car, so to speak. They did not understand that the kingdom he was ushering in was to be fully fulfilled in a future time. They asked him, “*Is now the time that you will restore the kingdom to Israel, Lord?*” *Is now when justice will roll down like the waters, when wrong will be made right, when suffering will end? Will it be now that God is going to bring down the Roman empire on our terms, when we will be finally in pilot seat?*² Lord, are

¹Kristin-Adkins-Whitesides. “Sermon: Ascension 5-21-2023” <https://asermonforeversunday.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Kristin-Adkins-Whitesides-Ascension-5-21-2023.pdf> (accessed 5-18-23).

² Rob Lee. “Waiting on the World to Change” <https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/645916476615fbeb70000020/rob-lee-waiting-on-the-world-to-change>. (accessed 5-18-23).

we there yet?” And, Jesus so patiently answered, “No. We aren’t there yet.” “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.”

Hmmm. *“That the Father has set by his own authority”... “That the Omnipotent and Almighty Master of the Universe has set by his own authority”.* Jesus was telling the disciples to simply wait, to wait for a future that God was controlling. And THAT must have been hard for them. They wanted to have an **endpoint** to look forward to, and they wanted a hand in **controlling** themselves getting there. However, as Jesus continued, it became more clear that there was a silver lining in it all. There was good news. And that was, that God was going to use them to bless the world! God was going to use THEM to accomplish God’s plan! They were going to be used to spread the story of Christ everywhere. And what’s more, they were going to be empowered by God to do this. Jesus said this, right before he was taken up into the clouds, disappearing from their sight.

Yes, that’s right. Luke tells us that Jesus ascended to the Glory for whence he came. In so doing, he was released from space and time, and he was affirmed as Lord. The disciples were overwhelmed by the scene. *“While he was going, the disciples were gazing up toward heaven,”* Scripture says. They were standing aghast with their mouths hanging open. There’s a famous painting of the Ascension with the apostles looking up, mouths open, staring at Jesus’ feet as he disappeared out of sight. *“Two men in white robes stood by them,”* and these angels said, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”* The angels, scholars say, were asking a rhetorical question, but I say they were using more of a poke with a cattle prod. The angels were really saying, *“What are ya doin’? “Get busy” “There’s work to do”!* Rev. Peter Gomes says: *“Consternation, wonder, and awe are not luxuries in the economy of salvation, they are necessities, but they are not, in and of themselves, sufficient!”*³ Correct. The disciples were being told to attend to the work which needed to be done even though they’ve had liked to skip the rest of their lives and rise up with Jesus right then. They needed to

³ Peter Gomes. *Ascension. The Absent and the Present Christ.* In: *Sermons Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living.* (New York: William Morrow & Co, Inc; 1998), 92-96.

go back to Jerusalem and ready themselves for the coming of the Spirit and then begin the work that God planned for their lives. Certainly, they were blessed to see it unfold. Barbara Brown Taylor says that when these 11 men stopped looking into the sky and began to focus instead on one another and on neighbor. *“It was,”* she says, *“as if Jesus had not ascended but exploded, so that all the holiness that was once concentrated in him alone flew everywhere...so that the seeds of heaven were sown in all the fields of the earth.”*⁴

Ok...so, some of you might right now be waiting, waiting for the results of a medical test, for the letter of acceptance to college, or maybe your long-awaited retirement... you want to put these on the calendar as endpoints ...something, like the disciples, that we want, something we want to plan for. Some of you too may be saving for that piece of property, or the vacation of a life-time, or just the opportunity to find quieter less busy lives. We want control, control over the time tables and the playing out of our lives. But just as the Son of God met the disciples, and brought into focus a new purpose and pathway, one bigger than they could have possibly imagined, and just as the Spirit gave them strength and resources to then go out into the world to accomplish it, so too are our lives not our own. The Master has a plan for them. We are called to the work of God in the world, and “we will be blessed to watch it unfold”.⁵ (*Long pause*)

And what is that work, specifically? Well, it is the same...to be his witnesses. It is to let ourselves be used to change and bless the world, to, as Rob Lee says, *“remind it of its loveliness, its possibility and potential, and tell it of its promise and redemption in Christ.”* We are to begin by talking like Jesus and walking like Jesus and acting as him. Even an ordinary hug or card can convey Christ’s unbounded love and blessing. Even the smallest donation of food or money can sometimes result in life rather than death. A simple act of kindness when the world seems so cruel can transform. A gentle smile given on a dreary day, a minute spent listening when no one else will, soft words of encouragement which drown noisy or bullying insults ... all of these can witness Jesus.

⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor, “Looking Up Toward Heaven” In: *Gospel Medicine*. (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1995), 72.

⁵ Kristin-Adkins-Whitesides.

I still love the old story of a statue of Christ found by some soldiers during recovery work after WWII. It was damaged following the bombing of a church. Both of Jesus' hands on his outstretched arms had been severed off. Sculptors offered to replace the missing hands, but after deliberation, church leaders decided to leave the statue without hands as a message that the work of Jesus is done through us. A sign was placed at the statue's feet which referred to the famous poem by St. Teresa of Avila: "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours, Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ's compassion to the world, Yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good."⁶

So, brothers and sisters, the takeaway from today's text may be for us to recognize that on our lives' journeys, it is God who is holding the map and steering the car. We may want to know the endpoint and to be control to get there, we are nothing but the passengers. We may want to skip the miles between one place and another, but we are subject to the driver. However, we have been given a wonderful divine purpose and plan. We are to be his witnesses, ones to share his love with a hurting world. We are on a better journey than we could have charted out for ourselves; it's a Spirit-filled crazy wild ride. Let's not ask "*Are we there yet?*" It's the wrong question...because the journey has just begun and well...we have work to do. We have work to do in this world.⁷ Amen.

Let us pray: Wondrous King, Ascended Lord, while we look to the day when once again you will come in glory, we thank you for your spirit's presence with us now. Know that our hands and hearts overflow with the desire to walk and talk and act and simply love as you have loved, and in so doing to be used in your bringing God's Kingdom to earth. By your spirit, empower us to be your witnesses to the ends of the earth. *Veni, Creator Spiritus*. Come, Creator Spirit. Come. Amen.

⁶ P. Pitterle. "Christ Has No Hands But Ours" <http://pitterlepostings.blogspot.com/2009/12/christ-has-no-hands-but-ours.html> (accessed 7-18-15).

⁷ Kristin-Adkins-Whitesides.