


***“Is It Time?”***

**Sunday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**Ascension Sunday**

 **Acts 1:1-11 (NRSV)**

## **The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father.

*“This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

## The Ascension of Jesus

So when they had come together, they asked him,

*“Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

He replied, *“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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.”*

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

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.”*

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

*Thanks, be to God.*

## **[2<sup>ND</sup> Service: Affirmation of Faith]**

### **[MESSAGE]**

*“Are we there yet?”*

Whether you have children or just remember when you were a child, we all have some experience with this annoying question.

It seems like we start hearing it almost as soon as the journey begins.

Thirty minutes in to a four-hour car ride:

*“Are we there yet?”*

Then it continues with increasing frequency until you arrive at your destination.

At the heart of this question is a sense of anticipation and excitement for the destination.

Have we reached Grandma’s house, the Lake, or Disneyland yet?

Is it time for the real fun to start?

I think that is what drives the disciples' question today:

***“Is it time for you to restore the kingdom to Israel? Are we there yet?”***

Jesus' answer is unsatisfying: *“It is not for you to know the time.”*

Imagine the reaction of your kids in the backseat if you answered their question that way!

Part of the reason Jesus answers as he does is that the disciples have asked the wrong question.

They are seeking a political restoration of the kingdom of Israel; they still don't understand what's up with Jesus.

***“Not getting it”*** is a distinguishing quality of Jesus' disciples.

Think of Peter's constant stumbles, the disciples bickering about who is the greatest (not once but twice in Luke: chapters 9 and 22).

And what about James and John asking to sit at Jesus' left and right hands to demonstrate how

well they've understood what he's said about his passion and death.

After everything Jesus has said and done, they want to know: *“Are we there yet?”*

Apparently, they missed the part where he said, *“My kingdom is not of this world.”*

**Let us pray**...Lord, sometimes we ask questions when the answers should be obvious. Thankfully, you are patient with us and offer to guide us to the answers once again. Be with us now as we seek to know you better. Help us see what the right questions are and give us the patience to wait for the answers. It is in your name that we pray. **Amen.**

This is an important story for the church today, not just because it represents the beginning of church history, but also because it helps define the mission of the church.

The story begins with a short transition that reminds readers that it is Luke speaking in sort of a sequel to his gospel.

Luke's gospel narrative ends with Jesus appearing to the disciples after the "*Emmaus*" story.

He leads the group out to Bethany and there, "*he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.*"

The Book of Acts picks up this thread and expands on it to bring us a more complete picture.

Jesus spent his life teaching, feeding, and healing; most recently he died and was raised.

The disciples have been there with him through all of this and, in the end, Jesus makes sure they are all together when he gives his final instructions.

He tells them to go, stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes to them.

Then, they are to go and, "*be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

John Wesley, father of the Methodist movement, used this story as the foundation for one of his most important declarations: “*The world is my parish.*”

What a concept: the whole world is our congregation.

This is an expansive and ecumenical view of ministry.

Our Wesleyan heritage suggests that we must not get stuck thinking that God only shows up inside our church or inside what box we try to put God into.

God’s presence and activity encompass the whole world, indeed, “*the ends of the earth,*” so ministry and mission are possible everywhere.

Church structures help us do ministry, but ministry is not confined to those structures.

Wesley insisted that we share the good news of God’s love and do good in all places.

God is pulling us to participate in God’s work in the world.

God is always ahead of us in ministry, down the block, across the country, and around the world.

The church, as the body of Christ is never hiding in a building, but it is sent to the world to proclaim the Good News. <sup>i</sup>

Still, the disciples want to know, “How long, O Lord?”

Is it time for the kingdom to be restored?

Is it time for generations of suffering to be over?

Is this the time, Lord?

*“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.”*

Now, let’s remember that the question, “*is it time?*” is based on a sense of anticipation, of expectation.

Everyone expects God to do something: to clothe Jesus' friends with power and to call them into action.

The apostles understand the messianic nature of what lies ahead; their question to Jesus about the restoration of Israel is perfectly reasonable.



The Messiah is expected to purify the land and rule over the nations.

Is this finally the time?

The Ascension is not the end of a story; rather, Jesus' departure initiates the next chapter in the story of God's salvation.

The verses preceding the ascension turn our attention toward what God will yet do, even as they claim that Jesus' followers will play a part in God's plans.

And the plans are ambitious.

This makes verses 10-14 especially interesting.

When the two messengers in white robes call Jesus' cloud-gazing apostles back to their senses, they do not order them to get to work.

Although there is urgency in their call to stop staring slack-jawed into the sky, that urgency does not result in immediate action.

The first great act of the apostles occurs when they hike back to Jerusalem...**and wait.**

Indeed, in time the apostles and the rest of Jesus' followers will be moving outward and bearing witness to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But not yet.

In time the realities about which Jesus spoke--the kingdom of God, forgiveness of sins, release from the things that bind people--will come into clearer view.

The waiting time makes an important point about how God will interact with these people.

Presumably, the Holy Spirit could have come immediately after Jesus' ascension; but God waits; rather, God has Jesus' followers wait.

I like to think that in this waiting they learn, or begin to learn, that they are to be a responsive community, a community that waits upon God to initiate.

Whether they walk back to Jerusalem from the ascension with eager energy or paralyzing fear we do not know.

All we know is that they have to wait.

The waiting has an active quality to it, going beyond merely sitting around and contemplating the past and future.

The apostles wait secluded in a "room upstairs," where they are "constantly devoting themselves

to prayer" along with others who followed Jesus, both men and women.

The group remains sequestered, yet expectant.

In their waiting, they obey Jesus' recent commands; but, even more, they also express a readiness for the wild stuff yet to come.

The waiting period conditions them to be attentive to God, so that they might respond when the time is right.

They wait in a context of enormous and not fully explained expectations.

They live in uneasy anticipation of the new realities that Jesus has initiated.

Living like this requires just as much courage as if Jesus had told them to go out immediately and change the world using their own brains and muscles.

They wait, not because they see it as their only option, but because they expect big things to come from God--things in which they will be privileged to play important roles. <sup>ii</sup>

// We *also* wait and we ask the question, "*Is it time?*" not to defy Jesus, but to turn the query toward us.

Is it time we began acting like the church?

Is it time for us to pay attention to Jesus' call?

Is it time for us to listen to the voice from heaven  
that speaks to each one of us?

## **Is it time?**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> The Wesley Study Bible, © 2009, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, "*Wesleyan Core Term*," page 1322

<sup>ii</sup> Skinner Matt, professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, commentary on Acts 1:6-14