

What Are We Waiting for?

Psalm 68:4–10, 32–35 • Acts 6:4–14

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. **5** For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 1:6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Acts 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

Acts 1:10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. **11** "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. **13** When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. **14** They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Study

4: Jerusalem will be the epicenter of the Church.

Gift — The Holy Spirit is not something we earn, but we can prepare for it!

Promised — It's coming!

6: The Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. Not a particular place—Israel, the US or Utah—but wherever and whenever the rule of God is evident. Which means that the Kingdom of God is happening all around us and within us, but more on that in a minute.

7–8: Knowing when Jesus is coming is not as important as the mission that God has given us—to be witnesses to Jesus, and witnesses who belong to Jesus.

9: Into the sky means "heavenward," but doesn't literally mean that heaven is in the sky. The cloud symbolizes the glory of God (see the cloud filling the Tabernacle in Exodus, the Temple in 1 Chronicles, and in the Transfiguration).

- 10: "two men dressed in white" is the Bible's visual cue that these are angels, messengers sent from God
- 11: Jesus didn't just go. Jesus is coming back! The general sense was that would happen in their lifetimes. Still, put together with Jesus' teaching in v. 7
- 12: The Mount of Olives was one of Jesus and the disciples favorite places. It was less than a mile away from Jerusalem.
- 14: Together. Constantly in prayer. The whole community—not just the apostles.

Message

I can't believe we're here! Oh my gosh, when we left Quincy, MA ten days or so ago, we thought we were never going to get here. Especially when we were in Iowa and then Nebraska, for two days, we thought, "Is this ever going to end?" I can't speak for Cynthia, but I was like a kid on the inside, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" We were so excited when the mountains came into view, because at least something was changing. And then we finally got here, and Mike and Carla met us with food for our fridge, the bed we ordered and some furniture so we didn't have to sit on the floor. And Cissy and Ron brought dinner, goodies and some necessities. We are so very grateful for all the ways you all have showed kindness to us, loved on us, and helped us know what's what. And today, our stuff comes! Hallelujah! In some ways, it feels like getting here and moving in is the finish line for us.

Was it like that for you? You all voted to call me as your Pastor in March, and though you all had things to do to get ready, did you ever feel like, "Are they here yet? Are they here yet?" So many of you have been working so hard to do the pastoral search, to help us get here, to find us a place to live, and to lay the groundwork for us to be here—does it feel like crossing the finish line today? Especially after the last eighteen months in which you were deciding as a congregation what God wanted for your fellowship—to stay together, to sell the building, to find a place to worship, to empty the building, and to celebrate all the ministry you had done. Turning in your keys must have really felt like the finish line for you! So maybe for some of you today feels like a double finish line—whew! Glad that's done! Isn't it interesting that the disciples have some of that going on in our passage for today? Jesus has completed His ministry on earth, and ascends into heaven, and all they can do is stare into the sky after Him. What comes next for them, in lots of ways, can help us think about what comes next for us.

First, knowing where the finish line is, is not as important as living into our mission. Whether we are talking about a trip to a new state, or the effort to sell a building or find a new pastor, or when Jesus is coming again, "Are we there yet?" is not an especially helpful question. Jesus says, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." What matters is that God is going to give us the power we need to witness to who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us.

Second, witnessing to Jesus brings the Kingdom of God. It's easy to think of the Kingdom of God as "when Jesus returns" or the Endtimes. We are a little like the disciples in that. But everything Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God in the Gospels points to it being where God is in charge, and in opposition to the kingdom of this

world. C.S. Lewis writes, "Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage."¹ Jesus, of course, established the beachhead for the Kingdom of Heaven. Like Normandy on D-Day, when the Allied forces stormed the beaches to establish a zone from which a new regime would spread and eventually take hold all across Europe until the war was over, so Jesus stormed the hillsides and byways of Palestine to establish a beachhead from which the Kingdom of heaven would spread and take hold, and one day the war will be over, and all that will exist is the Kingdom of God. But for today, how do we demonstrate that the love and grace and peace we know through Jesus are most important in our lives? Or as one person put it, if we were put on trial for loving Jesus today, would there be enough evidence to convict us? Wherever we go, wherever we evidence the love of God, the Kingdom of God becomes real to the people around us.

For months, even years, you all and I have been waiting for each other to be at just the right place for God to do something wild and wonderful with us. Last year, you all did what for many churches is unthinkable—you sold your building! And not because you couldn't afford to take care of it, but because you wanted to spend your energy on being a blessing and showing the grace of Jesus Christ. So it would be natural for us to feel like we had reached the finish line, but like the disciples in our passage today, we have more ahead of us—perhaps even the best parts! We have been through the sacrifice of Good Friday, and resurrection power of Easter is just ahead! What are we waiting for now? We are waiting for God to give us His Holy Spirit, so we can know how God wants to change the world through us. We are waiting for God to bring us power, so we can reach out to people we don't even know yet, and love them well. How long do we wait? In a sense, as Jesus says, "It is not for you to know the times and the days set by your Father." In another sense, like the disciples who have just watched Jesus ascend into heaven, you all have worked so hard and done some really heavy lifts the last eighteen months. Just as God inserts a waiting period for the disciples, so God has given us this waiting time. It's not a do-nothing period, and we don't need to keep asking, "Are we there yet?" No, we are in a season of getting ready. To get ready for what's next for them, the disciples in our passage do more praying, and more spending time together. To get ready for what's next for us, this summer, let's spend more time together. To recharge ourselves for the next great thing, let's pray more and get closer to God together. To prepare ourselves for deeper loving and compassion, let's keep living into our mission, witnessing to the love and grace of Jesus Christ with our neighbors and our neighborhoods. Together, we will see how God is able to strengthen and change us for what is to come. God has promised power and Spirit to us, so that we can show everyone in this city how amazing God's grace can be. I can't wait to see what God is going to do with us!

¹C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (NY: Collier Books, 1952), p. 56.