

May 28 2017

Reading from the Bible Acts 1:1-14

Sermon “Angel Questions”

This morning we are going to turn to the book of Acts and there is a question asked that goes right along with questions that the angel asked at the tomb 40 days prior from when Jesus rose from the dead. Remember when the women went to the tomb on Easter morning the angel asked. “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he is risen.” The second question which we will consider this morning is found in this portion of Acts.

Act 1: 1-14

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 over the course of 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.’

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 towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards 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.’

As some of you know I have started a Church of Christ class on polity and theology this week and I have to admit I am not a polity nerd as to how you run a church. But I am a history nerd. I like history and I like the fact that this class seems to be focusing not on just dates and places and theology but on people-what they were thinking and what was going in their lives.

A man named John Robinson was a faithful preacher to the pilgrims when they were in Holland. He was beloved, gentle and kind. The pilgrims were in a foreign country away from their beloved England. They were determined that they were going to go to the New World. This brave little group first went on the Speedwell-a

ship which did not live up to its name which took them to England and then later to the Mayflower which took them on to Plymouth. Robinson hoped that somehow these new pilgrims on their journey way would take the teaching of the Reformation renewal of the church to the new World and would continue to seek God's will and way. God was with them in the past and he prayed that God would continue to be with them. Finally all things were ready and they spent the day with him preaching and preparing their farewell. The poor people did not get much sleep the night before they took off. They boarded the ship very doleful and it was a mournful party with sobs, sighs, prayers and tears gushing from their eyes. Even the best strangers that stood on the shore could not refrain from tears. Many of them would never meet again. And Robinson would die within five years. They fell on their knees as he preached and commended them to the Lord's with fervent prayers and his blessing. On the night before Robinson preached on Ezra 8:21 probably not a verse you would have memorized. I know I had to look up as well. That story was about the exile when the people were going to leave Persian and go back to Jerusalem. And Ezra made the case with leaders of Persian that God would protect them. He preached on it and they prayed to God to protect them on their way. The moral of the story was a tough trip and a tough landing; the Pilgrims didn't land where they were expected to land. It was not in the place where they had provisions for and many of them died but their faith flourished. They became a part of our family of church history. They had the courage and faith that propelled them to this awesome place and it was only by the power of the resurrected and ascended Jesus Christ.

We often turn the story of Jesus' Ascension into a big holiday event in our churches. It is enjoyed in churches in one I remember in one particular time jumping for joy but sometimes we can feel left behind. The ascension happened 40 days after Easter. It was actually celebrated last Thursday-you weren't around so I saved the sermon for this morning. These verses in the book of Acts talks about preparation. Jesus appeared to them frequently and then with great truth that he was living. The disciples and other believers may have started to feel that maybe he was going to stay around again. Maybe they were hoping and perhaps in their thoughts were, now what and then one day. Were they prepared enough? He told them about the kingdom of God. But they still thought Jesus was going to be a king on a throne and the country would be great again but that wasn't the plan. They wanted to when and how but Jesus told them the fullness of time was up to God. He didn't know when God was going to bring all of this to consummation so don't ask. The disciples wanted to know even as people today want to know. People say this and this is the time but the Bible is very clear. It is not only is fruitless but is really not faithful. Jesus said don't bother with the times and the seasons just know what I preached is true. My promises are true. This is the point in time when

Jesus is physically and bodily with the disciples and then comes the time when he is not there anymore.

Luke talks a little more about this moment and I think we need hear that too. I'm thinking that is like when somebody is in the hospital and is flown out by helicopter to another hospital. My mom was flown out twice and it is a gut wrenching time when you see that helicopter lifting off. You don't know whether you will see that person again in Sacred Heart. You don't know if that person will live to get there and you don't know what the future holds and you don't know what to expect. And you stand looking up waving at the helicopter. That was not the response of the disciples. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands not unlike pastor Robinson. While Jesus was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and they continued blessing God. Not what we would expect when you are saying goodbye to your leader. You expect the something like the pilgrims' reaction as they were getting ready to sail off. What the disciples had learned from Jesus had set them on edge of their seats because in a few days something big is going to happen. The disciples were not sure what to expect about the gift of the Holy Spirit. We don't exactly know what the disciples expected. They knew that in the past the Holy Spirit would land on this one over here or that one over there. It might fall on a leader over there or a prophet might be filled with the spirit. But they knew something big was going to happen. Jesus had promised and talked about the Holy Spirit so much. A big unknown a promise was still a promise. The transformation had begun with joy and not with fear. This is a group of 11 and at Pentecost maybe a 120. This was not a big group. They were underdogs; underdogs under the Jews and underdogs under the Romans. They were feeling empowered beyond anything that they could even imagine. The Comforter (the Holy Spirit was called the Comforter) that came from courage that would strengthen them. They were start with the known; start right where you are, just like us—right in your home town. Then the disciples were to go out to Judea, a little bit bigger, and then they were in Samaria that was part of the United Kingdom, and then to the ends of the earth. That might even be Newport.

Then the cloud hid Jesus, the disciples were intent in looking up into the sky. I loved the angel's questions "Why are you looking up in the sky?" The disciples may have thought he would reappear again like he did in the Transfiguration. The angel's said Jesus is not coming back right but he will return in the same way that he left. Angel said go, go- get busy- don't just stand there but do something. The angel said, "Snap out of it, guys- do something." Maybe pouring a bucket of cold water on them would make them stir. We see all those action movies so we might be surprised if we see somebody walk into the sun especially in a movie. These

were people who didn't even have electricity or see anyone nominally rise up into the sky. They would understand Jesus' words, "I will be with you"; but meanwhile they would stand in wonder, awe amazement, worship and gratitude I think we need more wonder and awe in our lives. You know their lives and our lives are kind of mundane, paying bills and doing all those kinds of things. You know, Travis and Jace (the graduates) the whole thing of graduation is a wonderful thing but ahead of you have to get some things done. You are going somewhere else and you will write more papers and do more tests and life will seem mundane again. This story shows that there is nothing mundane in following Jesus; it is awesome; it is wonderful. Jesus didn't do this to make the disciples do awe and wonder but they had a big job ahead of them. Jesus was with them; Jesus was crucified and buried; and Jesus rose again and he ascended into heaven. And we might think so, so what! They were right. Jesus was right where he were supposed to be in heaven where he is ruler and he is judge. If he had not ascended into heaven we would have no place for our prayers. The cosmetic world is bigger than anything than we can imagine. We are here to celebrate Ascension and he will return someday. If you read the book of Revelations, as many people do and try to figure it out but just enjoy the book and remember the storyline is in the end God wins. The Holy Spirit, the floodgates have opened at Pentecost and we would have access to the Holy Spirit. Jesus abides in us and we abide in him. His kingdom is much bigger than being a Messiah on an earthly throne. Here is the sequel, when Jesus is on earth in the future and it is for you and me in places we have never heard of or languages you never spoken. One thing in the story of John Robinson I particularly liked that he said, "Be clothed with just what you know right now at this point, God has greater light and wisdom to impart. That is one of features of our denomination's slogan, "God is still speaking."

Don't get stuck in whatever is said about God, experience God by yourself. Don't get stuck in the prejudices or the narrowest or self-efficiency view of God. Don't ever settle for that kind of faith. Listen for what God will say to you today. And that is what you- graduates- are to take with you into college. Find a place to worship. Find a college ministry or a church that will challenge and will involve in missions. Find activities that will challenge you. Check out your own heart and find out what God wants you to do and where he wants you to go.

The angels said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? Why do you look for Jesus among the old stories while Jesus is here?" And why are you standing looking up into the sky with you mouths open and your feet stuck in the mud? We need to be mindful that we can be stuck without hope or look for hope in the wrong places; we can rely on our own understanding or we can be open to the windows of what God is already doing and open to the doors through which we can walk.

Gracious God, we thank you and we thank you deeply that you are a God who is still speaking. We thank you are opening us to more life and truth breaking through every day in our lives. You are alive and the Holy Spirit is alive. We thank you that you have given us hope and you are an advocate in heaven. Help us to be faithful to you whether we minister in our neighbor or in Newport or this area or even to the ends of the earth. Help us to be ready to follow you. Amen