



May 24, 2020 • The 7th Sunday of Easter  
Acts 1:6-14  
The Rev. Anthony Estes

The story from the Book of Acts finds Jesus and his disciples on the Mount of Olives.

You see it has been 40 days after his resurrection, and he has spent this time with his disciples, with his friends, teaching them and enjoying their presence and eating with them.

And now the time has come that he needs to go back to Heaven, that he needs to go back to his father. He needs to ascend.

And just before he's getting ready to do that, just as his feet are perhaps getting ready to lift up off the ground, they ask him: *"When will the time be that you are going to restore the kingdom?"*

Now this is a sensible question because these folks, these men, these women, have accepted the claim that Jesus is the Messiah, the one that the prophets of old have talked about.

They have understood that the Messiah would come to do all kinds of things.

Yes, signs and miracles would all be proof that the time of the Messiah had come, but also this Messiah would restore the Kingdom of Israel to its glory days, as it were. All of the exiles would return. All of the lost tribes would return. And the temple in Jerusalem would be restored, and everything would be as it had once been in its best days, before the Babylonians and the Assyrians, before the Romans.

And so the question makes sense. And Jesus doesn't dismiss the question.

He simply says there are some things that are not for you to know. God has determined this and God has everything under control. And you can't really know what that is right now, but you will receive power after the Holy Spirit, after the Holy Ghost, has come upon you...and you're are going to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Sumeria, and unto the ends of the earth.

This story for these Jews would have been really reminiscent of the story of Elijah, the prophet, and Elisha. Elijah is, of course, going to be carried into Heaven on a fiery chariot. Elisha, his successor,

stands there looking up. And as he is looking up, Elijah's mantle comes down out of the chariot. Elisha picks it up, receives Elijah's mantle and continues the work of Elijah.

What Jesus is saying to his disciples is that what I need you to now is wait here in Jerusalem, wait until you receive the gift, the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Advocate. Wait until you receive the Holy Ghost...so that you can be my witnesses, so that you can continue this work, even while you wait for the coming of the Kingdom, even while you wait for its restoration.

Ah, waiting. That's one of those difficult things to do. We all know that we must, but none of us really likes waiting.

I describe myself as not particularly patient. I want it right now...when I want it!

And of course this passage of scripture helps to remind us that sometimes we have to wait on God. But it is not to be an idle waiting.

They were asked, *"Why are you gazing up into Heaven?"* After Jesus had ascended these two men appeared out of nowhere in white clothes and asked them, *"Why are you looking up?"* Don't you know that Jesus whom you've just seen ascend will come again in the same manner? It's almost as if they are saying, *"So, isn't there something else you should be doing?"*

While we wait for the new normal, whatever that's going to be post COVID-19, isn't there something else we should be doing? I think so.

I think we should be trying to figure out how to continue to be witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world, as changed and not ideal as it is.

I think we need to continue to find ways to engage with one another, to see one another, to check in with one another.

Here at Christ Church we are still trying to figure out how to support our outreach mission and our outreach goals. We're trying to find ways to connect with one another, make sure that people who are without technology get help with technology so that they can see us and be with us on-line. I think that's all a part of it.

I think that we have all figured out how to get our groceries and still go out for walks and get our exercise in. Perhaps some of us have discovered practices of devotion and meditation that we didn't have before in this time.

I think all of that, all of that, is how the spirit of God is at work among us to keep us engaged, to keep us active as faithful witnesses to God. Not just witnesses in the sense that we saw something with our eyes, but witnesses in the sense that we are testifying to the character of God in display in Jesus Christ.

The God that we are waiting on in Jesus is a God that in some ways is invisible...but still powerfully present and active in us by his Spirit.

And so after they have been exhorted by these two messengers, their gaze turns from Heaven to Jerusalem. They walk about a half mile's journey into the city. They go into an upper room, and they begin to pray, the men and the women.

And I would note that even though there are cultural prejudices in that day and time, the fact that these men and women are praying together is already a sign that what God is doing among God's people at that time is radical and different.

So they're praying in that room together, seeking understanding, perhaps seeking openness to the Spirit.

They enter a Jerusalem that is occupied by the very force that they thought the Messiah was supposed to kick out. And there they are, praying and waiting. (And I think they can do that, in contrast to how some of the disciples acted after Jesus' resurrection — which was cut and run.)

I think that they can do that because now that they have seen the risen Lord, now that they have seen this Jesus ascend bodily into Heaven, I think they now have the assurance they need...to know that if Jesus says it's going to happen...it will.

And so they can work and pray and watch while they wait for whatever is going to come next.

I don't know what's coming next. I don't think anybody really knows what's coming next for our church, for the world. We have hopes. We have dreams. We have a plan.

But what we do have more than that is the assurance that the Holy Spirit is with us. That God is with us. That Jesus is still alive. That Jesus is still with us!

And no matter what...we can continue on.

So whatever your hands find to do to continue to testify about the goodness of God in this world, do it. Knowing that whatever is coming, whether good or bad, the God that we wait for, the God that we depend on has not abandoned us, will not abandon us.

And that God's dream for the world, for peace, for safety, for security, for love, for justice...it will come to pass one day, one witness at a time.