

Why Do You Stand Looking Up?
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June 1, 2014

Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Acts 1:1-11

¹ In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ 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. ⁴ 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; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’

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 towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ 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.’

Three years ago to this date, I began in ministry here. When I began, I certainly wasn’t expecting glamour. A broken sound system and a half-broken air conditioning system are reminders of the far more real nature of this work, should I become delusional thinking otherwise. I do joke – I didn’t come to ministry expecting glamour. I came because I wanted to share the good news of God’s redeeming, life-giving love, and do so even in the face of obstacles. Today, the obstacles are technological but they will not deter me. They do, perhaps, encourage my brevity - but they do not deter me.

What we just read are complementary passages. I placed the reading from the gospel of Luke before Acts because they are intentionally ordered that way in our guide, the Bible. The Acts of the Apostles are considered part two to the first part of the gospel of Luke. In part, that’s why the stories

seem somewhat redundant. More so, it's why the very end of Luke is repeated in the very beginning of Acts. You may have noticed in Acts that Jesus spent forty days teaching the disciples – this is from where our forty days of teachings called Eastertide comes – between the resurrection of Easter Sunday and the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

These disciples, whom we remember as a bit thick all along have had their minds opened by Jesus so they could understand all that he taught them. He takes them out to Bethany, where he once mounted upon a donkey and her foal, and then sends them into Jerusalem, by the same way he made his triumphal entry. As Jesus ascends we might think of that time as being the end of his ministry but really it is the beginning of the church's ministry, to teach about repentance and the forgiveness of sins. This time, instead of hiding in Jerusalem out of fear as they did after the resurrection, they are instructed to stay in Jerusalem in anticipation of the arrival of the Holy Spirit, of the power from on high.

In Luke we hear that the disciples went back to Jerusalem rejoicing and worshiping Jesus and blessing God. Before we get there in Acts, before they have even had time to process what happened, as they are watching Jesus ascend, be taken up by a cloud, two men in white are there, whom we can assume to be holy messengers by their apparel, and asking the disciples "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven?" This might sound like a chide, as in "get moving." That could be true but I prefer to believe their words are merely a reminder that there is work waiting for them. Jesus has ascended and Jesus will return and between those two times, the church has a mission to carry out, work to do.

The work which is waiting? Well, we'll hear next week, once they receive the Holy Spirit, they begin speaking in tongues as varied as the people present and, in return, they are accused of being drunk. What payback, right? Here's the thing, though: this time, because they understood what Jesus taught, they didn't go back to their safe day jobs of fishing like they tried after the resurrection. Because they now understood what Jesus taught, that God's love is expansive and radical and able to overcome even death, they couldn't help but go out and teach the same. The work was not safe, like their fallback of fishing, and it was not glamorous. But that wasn't why they taught, was it? That's not why any of us choose to share God's good news. It may not be glamorous but, because the news is good, very good, we cannot help but go out and teach such good news.

Let us pray: Risen Lord, open our minds to your word so that our hearts might be opened as well, making it impossible for us to keep your good news to ourselves, no matter the obstacle. Amen.