

“Why Do You Stand There Looking to Heaven?”

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Acts 1:1-11

Jesus appeared to the disciples just before his ascension. He tells them to remain in Jerusalem until they receive the promised gift of power from God to bear witness to the good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Listen for and hear God’s word to us this morning.

Acts 1:1-11

Why do you stand there looking to heaven? Isn’t that an interesting question? It’s one that always stands out for me. The disciples are standing there, at the top of the Mount of Olives, watching Jesus ascend into heaven. They just stand there. Long after Jesus goes, they’re still standing there. Finally, two men dressed in white robes, aka two angels, ask them what they’re doing? Which seems to me an appropriate question. In every one of the ascension narratives, Jesus gave them a task. But instead of doing what Jesus assigned them to do, they just stand there looking to the skies.

What are they waiting for? The angels imply that they’re standing there waiting for Jesus to return. Isn’t that the problem that continually plagues us as well? Throughout history, faithful Christians have often found themselves sitting around gazing at the heavens waiting for something; some times it’s for Jesus. Sometimes it’s for the economy to improve; sometimes it’s for the ‘real’ minister to be hired. Christians are very good at looking off into the clouds and waiting.

Before Jesus left the disciples he told them he didn’t know when he’d be back. But he also gave them a job to do while they were waiting. They were to spread the good news to the ends of the earth. They were to preach, teach and baptize. They were to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and free the oppressed. They were given enough to do to keep them busy to the end of their days. But they just stood there.

As their descendents in faith, we have been given the same charge. Until Jesus comes back, we, too, are to preach, teach and baptize. We are to spread the good news to the ends of the earth. And we are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and free the oppressed. But some of us are also staring off into heaven waiting... What is it that we are waiting for?

One of my favorite bumper stickers says: Jesus is coming. Look busy.

We shouldn’t just look busy, we should be busy. Until all the world has heard about the love of God as shown us in the life and ministry of Jesus, we’re not done. Until everyone is fed, clothed and freed, we’re not done. Until Jesus comes back and tells us we’re done, we’re not done. Jesus’ mission as passed down to us should be at the very center of our lives.

One of the commentators says: “On Ascension Day, we acknowledge that the Jesus who walks in history is the Christ who reigns in faith. He is both beyond us and above us: beyond us, in that we cannot domesticate him or limit him; above us, as the

One who will be our judge in God's time discerning whether we have been truly faithful disciples." (Minister's Annual Manual, p.363)

What does it mean to be faithful disciples? I think it involves both our actions and our attitudes. It means doing what needs to be done. But it also means living our lives with an attitude of grace and goodwill. And I believe, this is the Gospel According to Susan again, that our attitude may be even more important than our actions. It's not about waiting for someone else to do it. It's not about waiting for things to be perfect, or getting our own way. It's about being grateful, sharing what we have, doing what we can, and being at peace with God and ourselves.

Jesus asked his disciples, therefore his church, to be a body committed to mission—his mission. As each new area was colonized, a church was organized to oversee that missionary effort. In each setting, people were converted and baptized. Their spiritual and their physical needs were met. And the Church of Jesus Christ grew in wisdom and numbers--the growth being the direct result of people's personal experience of the public witness of Christ's followers. The disciples witnessed not just with their words, but with their lives. They lived out the gospel message in all they said and did.

Now it's our turn. It is up to us to be those witnesses. It is up to us to live out the gospel message in both our words and lives.

How do we do this? It is different for each of us. We need to be open to the voice of God in our lives. We need to be willing to listen and hear what God wants us to do. Some of us are called to work for and support mission endeavors far away. In this congregation some of our young people have been personally drawn to mission efforts in Mexico. This summer our youth group will be working with people in New York. Some of us have been called to fill the needs closer to home: mission efforts in Hartford, while programs for teenage mothers and food programs. There is no end to the things we can do. And there is something for everyone.

When the nominating committee begins its work to find people to do the daily work of the church, you can volunteer to do your part. There are parts large and small, one to fit your individual abilities: from flowers and ushering to church council and deacons. With each and every step we take to move forward in our communal life together, there will be a need for people to step up to lead and support us on our way: we'll need people to work at the Strawberry Festival, the Harvest Fair and Chicken Pie Supper. There will be a need for people to help the Mission Committee fill the mission box and take the items to the various charities. We need folks to teach church school, cover the nursery, and do coffee hour. We are one body with many members, each with a part to play.

So, are you just standing there, or are you doing your part—the part that may make all the difference?

Thanks be to God Amen.

