

“Now is the Time - Receive my Spirit, Be My Witnesses”
Shivon Miller, Sermon for May 24, 2020

Today’s scripture text tells the story of Jesus’ ascension, Jesus ascending into heaven to dwell with God, or as one cartoon on Facebook said “when Jesus started to work from home”.

Imagine being one of the apostles there with Jesus that day. These apostles have been Jesus’ friends. Within the year they have watched Jesus teach and heal. They have been with him as he has eaten with sinners and argued with Pharisees. They have listened as he has spoken strange words about impending death, crucifixion and trying times ahead. They have walked the road to Jerusalem beside him, shared in the last supper with him, fled as he was arrested and taken away, cried as he was nailed to the cross, lost hope when he was laid in the grave. These apostles had experienced the three days between Christ’s death and the empty tomb. These were the apostles that were described as “amazed and perplexed” at the news of the resurrection. They have now seen Jesus appear in the empty room, seen the scars in his hands and been offered his peace. They have walked with him on the road and eaten with him on the beach. They have lived with this man who tells of the unknown, lives the unexpected, does the unimaginable...

It is these apostles as they gather together with Jesus that ask “Lord, is this the time when you restore dominion to Israel?”...“Lord is this the time you restore?”...“Lord is this time?” They really want to know the plan. Sure, he is standing with them now but they have learned that Jesus does not stay in one place for long. Regardless of how many times Jesus had told them that he was going to die and rise from the dead, they were still surprised when it happened. Sure, he has come back from the dead but they are *all the more* nervous. They have just been through all that...now what? Can’t Jesus just tell them what’s next? How and when is God’s restoration going to become reality? “Please Jesus lay out the timeline. We don’t want any more surprises, any more unknown”.

I don’t know about you, but I can feel myself standing there with those apostles. I would ask. I would be nervous. I would want to know - “Is this it God?”, “What’s next?” “When will things be restored?”

I *DO* want to know...I find myself asking God every day especially now. “What’s about to happen? What’s next? When will things be restored?”

During this pandemic we have become frantic for our own timeline. The minute we know the plan for this week - our brains shift to worry about next week. We stew over what will happen during the summer and before the month of June has even begun we start to ask clarifying questions for the Fall. “Is this the time?” We long to have time laid out clearly before us so we can make our plans. We get nervous when we don’t know the timing of what lies ahead. We ask our city leaders, our governors, we seek the opinions of our friends. We whisper to God in prayer....“Oh God what next? Where and when is your restoration?”

The apostles stood before Jesus and asked “Lord, is this the time when you will restore dominion to Israel? Lord is this the time you will restore? Lord is this the time?”

And Jesus answers “It is not for you to know the times or the periods... It is not for you to know the times... It is not for you to know...”

That is Christ’s answer.

I imagine a following conversation on that hill – “What? Why not? Why won’t you tell us? Why so secretive? Jesus... we want to know.”

But no further timeline is spoken. Instead Jesus says these things: first “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” and then “you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth”.

How will we survive without a timeline? You will receive power from the Holy Spirit within you.

And what are we to do while we wait and wonder what will happen next? You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

It is at this point that Jesus is taken up in a cloud, removed from their sight. The disciples certainly hadn’t even seen that was coming. And they stand there gazing up to heaven. Stuck where they were last... because they hadn’t been told all that was to come. They stand frozen....

Two men in white robes appear and stand next to them. “Why do you stand looking up towards heaven? Jesus who has been taken up will come again”. And I imagine them slowly pulling their eyes from the sky to look at these two men, these messengers of God, with blank stares... “He didn’t give us the timeline.... he was here...he will come again... but we do not know the time...”

Jesus did not tell them a time....BUT Jesus did tell them what to do with their time in the meantime.

First, don’t stay stuck, standing here gazing up to heaven at what was, longing for more information. God sends two messengers to shake them out of that tendency. What are they to do instead?

Receive the power of the Holy Spirit and be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

This is a message to us as well. We do not know what time will bring but Jesus tells us what to do with our time in the meantime.

Don’t stay stuck, gazing at what was - longing for more information. Rather receive the power of the Holy Spirit and be Christ’s witnesses TODAY.

Receive the power of the Holy Spirit – Jesus promises to send an Advocate/a Helper to be God with us, God in us and God through us. You have already been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, God empowering you to trust and to live into God’s call. Simply breath into this gift you have been given. The word for Spirit in scripture is RUAH, which also means wind or breath. With each breath we breathe we know the free gift of life given to us and are reminded of the life giving gift of the spirit that fills us, advocates and helps us live into each moment of our life in Christ.

Be witnesses – witnesses working not towards a timeline but rather witnessing in each moment of each day we are given. We are to be witnesses to Christ. One definition of witness reads “to have knowledge of (an event or change) from personal observation or experience”. We are to witness, to share the news of our personal observations and experiences of Christ. We are to witness through **word and deed** to what we know to be true of our God, witnessed through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

It is as if Jesus says “You don’t have time to worry about the timeline for all that lies ahead, you have plenty for today, receive my spirit, be my witnesses...” Perhaps Christ even knows that **this IS the way of restoration...** By receiving my Spirit and being my witnesses you will be restored...the world God loves will be restored...

We live as witnesses to Christ’s Greatest Commandment and Christ’s Great Commission. With the Holy Spirit at work in us we are to witness to these through word and deed. Jesus says the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” He gives the great commission “Go make disciples of all nations baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you to the end of the age”. Love your God, Love your neighbor, go make disciples, baptize, teach - This gives us plenty to do today, right where we are... And most importantly remember “I am with you always even to the end of the age”.

“Why do you stand looking up towards heaven? Jesus who has been taken up will come again”. Let us pull our eyes from the skies, receive the Holy Spirit and be the witnesses we have been called to be.

Because Jesus’ ascension was not the day Jesus started to work from home but rather the day Jesus began to work through us. May we be part of God’s restoration work this day. Amen.