

## ***Sunday Morning Meditation***

***May 24, 2020 – Seventh Sunday of Easter***

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**“Why do you stand there looking up to the heavens?”**

### **Scripture Passage – [Acts 1:6-14](#)**

One of the many things that I love about the Old and New Testaments, is that unlike some sacred writings, the Old and New Testaments do not hide the blemishes of God’s followers. Flecks and flaws, blemishes and all are on display page after page. To be sure, the followers in the Old and New Testament were amazing people, but they were not perfect and the biblical story does not hide this fact.

Cases in point can be found right off the bat in the book of Acts. In verse 6, the disciples reveal exactly how limited and provincial their vision truly is. Even though Jesus has delivered the “Great Commission” that sends the church to the ends of the world to share God’s love, the disciples’ vision is still fixated on the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom. Verse 6 reads, *“Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

One of the most basic messianic expectations that gripped the people of Israel, and the disciples, was that the Messiah would conquer the Romans and restore Israel to her former glory as in the times of David. On numerous occasions in the gospels, the disciples have asked this question or acted in a certain way that revealed that their vision, their hope and dream for Jesus’ work, was defined by a restoration of an earthly Davidic kingdom. The disciples are still hemmed in by the littleness of their aspirations and expectations, longing for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy and the glory of ancient Israel, the throwing off of Roman oppression and the raising up of their own nationalistic glory. (Actually, that all sounds rather grand, but still, Jesus’ vision is so much greater and the disciples cannot see the fullness of Jesus’ vision, because they are still blinded by their own expectations and aspirations.)

Jesus responds to their question by redirecting them to the grandness of the vision that Jesus has for the church. Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come upon them and empower them, and they will be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Now what Jesus said regarding the Holy Spirit does not sound that grand to us, who are blessed by the presence of the Spirit. But one of the many unique realities of the New Testament, is that the Spirit can be fully present on each and every follower of Christ. And this concept of the Spirit being present fully and richly on each follower, would have blown the disciples' minds, because in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit only came upon great leaders like the Judges and Prophets, and even then, only as long as necessary for the Judge or Prophet to fulfill their calling and then the presence of the Spirit was withdrawn. But the presence of the Spirit was not on all the people and certainly was not a permanent, abiding sort of presence.

But that is what Jesus promised the disciples. The Holy Spirit was going to come upon each of them, and all of them who followed Jesus. That would have been mind blowing to the disciples. They themselves, each of them, would be filled with the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, just as the Judges and Kings and great Prophets had been.

But in addition to this mind-blowing tidbit, the disciples were also told that they would be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth. We have heard the story so often that we take it for granted. But this would have been earth-shaking news to the disciples. In their way of thinking, the people of Israel did not go to the world, the world came to the people of Israel. As arrogant as that sounds, that pretty much sums up the Israelites understanding of missions or outreach.

But here, Jesus changes their whole understanding of how the church, the new people of God, will approach missions. The church will not sit around waiting for the lost and the hurting and the hopeless of the world to come to the church. The church, will instead go to them. And not just in their own neighborhood or village or state or country, to the very ends of the earth the church will go to reach the lost and hurting and hopeless with the love of God. Jesus' vision is so much grander and greater than the disciples' vision of a restored Davidic kingdom, that it appears to leave the disciples speechless. The disciples, literally, do not say another word in this story.

And as the disciples are standing there all tongue tied, right before their very eyes, Jesus is lifted up in a cloud to the heavens.

What happens next, I think is proof positive that God has a sense of humor. For as the disciples stand there looking up into the heavens, two men in white appear before the disciples and say, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”* Why do they stand there? Well it is not every day that you see someone lifted up into the sky while riding on the clouds. I guess Elisha saw something like this, but I never have and I don't think you ever have, and certainly the disciples had never seen anyone lifted up into the sky while standing in the clouds. So I think it is perfectly understandable that the disciples are standing there looking up into the sky. I'm surprised that they did not start trying to build a temple to mark the spot. This is pretty monumental stuff, so stand there, soak it all in right!

Well I do not think the question is asked because the two men dressed in white are confused as to why the disciples are standing there looking up into the sky. The men dressed in white surely knew why the disciples were standing around staring up into the sky. I think the purpose of the question is really intended to get at the posture of the church.

The church is not called to stand around. The church is called to go out to the ends of the earth preaching the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. The church is go to the ends of the earth being witnesses to God's love, feeding the poor, clothing the naked, seeking justice for orphans and widows, declaring the presence of God's kingdom of peace and justice everywhere they go. The posture of the church is one of boldly going, not standing still, so the men dressed in white ask the disciples why they are standing around staring up into the sky, when there is work to be done.

This might sound harsh, but I honestly believe that many preachers in our churches today, like to preach about the end of the world, so that they can justify why they are not reaching out in love to the ends of the world. I mean if the world is about to end in some sort of fire and brimstone, why bother caring about that world. The Book of Acts is all about reaching out with God's love to the ends of the world... it is not about the end of the world!

So what is our posture today? Are we, like the disciples, blinded by some sort of provincial, nationalistic gospel that excludes people of the world rather than reaching out to all people in the world? Is our posture one of standing and waiting for the world to come to us; rather than us going to the world in love? What is our posture?