

SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

It's such an amazing story, we get to hear it twice. There wasn't a time loop this morning, and you didn't imagine it, we heard the story of the ascension twice. First, from the book of Acts (the sequel) and then from the Gospel of Luke.

Interestingly, though there is little question that the same author wrote these two books, even he can't get the story to match. The account in Luke happens on Easter day, after a long day of Jesus showing up in different places – explaining the resurrection to the disciples and those who gathered with him. The account of the ascension in Acts takes place 40 days later, after an extended period of Jesus teaching about the Kingdom of God to those who gifted with the chance to see him after the empty tomb.

Some things happen in both stories – the scriptures are unpacked so that the disciples would better understand how the law of Moses, the covenantal relationship with God, has been fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The disciples are instructed to wait for the Holy Spirit to show up to empower the next stage of their adventure and that mission will take them ever farther from Jerusalem, which has been the center of their community. And Jesus floats away into the clouds...whatever that might have looked like.

I was struck by two particular moments that highlight the reaction of the disciples to what is happening. I think that's often a good place for us to focus as we try to interpret what these stories are telling us about our life of discipleship.

For many years, my wife and I have held a common memory of a comedian's joke. We can't remember who it was, I thought maybe it was Rita Rudner, but google failed to help me find any evidence. But nevertheless, the moment has stuck with us for probably more than 20 years. This female stand-up comic was describing what it was like to travel with her kids. And in a moment that many of us can resonate with she was lamenting the endless question, "are we there yet?" To which she responded, while driving down the highway, "Yes, get out." We may have used that a few times with our kids once they were old enough to get the joke.

And it's what I think was in Jesus' mind when the disciples asked him, in the Acts version of the story, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Actually, I think Jesus may have had one of the largest eyerolls in history as a first response to this question.

Here they are, gathered together after the resurrection, in this period of 40 days in which Jesus is going to get them ready for their witness-bearing mission, and the disciples

are still stuck in the past. It's like they've seen the reality of the cross and empty tomb and still want Jesus to be the Messiah they assumed would come. Once again, Jesus has to tell them to stop focusing on their memory of the fallen kingdom of Israel and start focusing on the present reality of God's Kingdom. No matter how much their experience of God is changing reality, they are still waiting for the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. Are we there yet, Jesus?

Beyond that, I think the arc of the post-resurrection story is to stop waiting for what God **might** do next and start proclaiming what God has done. I know that there are explicit instructions to wait in these stories, but it's a historical account of the disciples waiting for the Holy Spirit to come at Pentecost. Yes, we'll celebrate **that** next Sunday, but we also have to remember that it already happened 2000 years ago. Stop waiting. Stop waiting for the restoration of the church that isn't the mission we've been given. Stop waiting for God to do something else...and witness to what God has already done. Are we there yet? Yes, get out. Get out and live this story for today's world.

It happens again in a slightly different way, later in the Acts story...Jesus has floated off into the clouds and the disciples are standing there...watching, waiting.

There's a scene in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, where Indy had been fighting with a German tank commander and the tank ends up rolling over a cliff. Indy's father and friend had seen this happen and are standing at the edge looking down in disbelief and oncoming heartbreak. Indy walks up behind them, shaken but okay, and looks down with them as if to say, "what are we looking at?" The celebration begins as they realize that he's okay and their journey continues.

I think of that scene as the disciples are standing there staring at the clouds. As if all that Jesus has said wasn't enough, they need the prompting of two men in white (perhaps the same two men who showed up at the empty tomb) to remind them to stop standing there with their mouths hanging open and get to what God has told them to do. "What are you looking at?" the messengers ask to get the disciples moving again.

It's so easy to get stuck...staring into the distance with hope or trepidation...or overwhelming fear. All too often, we need a kick in the you-know-what to get us moving. It's sometimes so much easier to sit or stand still imagining the beauty of God's Kingdom, but we've been given the work of **witnessing** to that kingdom. To proclaiming the forgiving love of God to the world. It's not about drifting off into the clouds after we die, it's about bringing the Kingdom into the world we occupy now – into our equivalent of Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news in our Galilee, witnessing to God's love to all nations.

Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures. I used to be jealous of that description – thinking that it meant they were given this super-secret, unknowable truth about what God was doing in their lives so that they could carry out the mission he was giving them. But then I realized that maybe it was Jesus simply reminding them of the story they already knew...connecting the dots for them between what God had been saying and doing throughout history, and the promise brought into the world with the resurrection.

We have the same story that the disciples have...more even. Maybe our minds have been opened in the same way every time we read or hear the story of Jesus and take the opportunity to wonder what God is doing in our lives. Maybe we should stop waiting for more and more information to process and simply do what God has told us to do. Maybe we should stop staring at the clouds and waiting.

Are we there, yet? Yes. Get. Out. Amen.