

## Acts 1: 1-11 & Luke 24: 44-53---Silly Questions?

In the record we have of Jesus' life with the disciples it seems that we find many silly questions being posed by them. Within our passage from the first chapter of Acts this morning it seems that we have another example of this. Even after what they have experienced through their journey with Jesus while he is teaching in the Galilean countryside, they persist in not understanding the good news that Jesus has brought of God's reign. When the resurrected Jesus came and spent time with them and spoke of the kingdom of God, opening the meaning of their scriptures to them, even then they evidently did not comprehend what their mission was to be. When Jesus tells them they are to remain together in Jerusalem to receive the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the question they ask Jesus is: "Lord, is **this** the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" They are still focused on the political oppression of the Roman occupiers and Israel's longing for a return to the glory of an independent nation. At this point Jesus does not seem to try to open their eyes to the nature of God's reign here on earth—he just tells them that they are to be his witnesses beginning in Jerusalem. In Acts, in direct response to that question he tells them it is not for them to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. According to Luke they have gathered together away from Jerusalem with Jesus near Bethany. Jesus blesses them and instructs them to remain in Jerusalem because it is there that they will receive the power of the baptism by the Holy Spirit. They have experienced the bodily presence of the resurrected Jesus yet he is ascending into heaven leaving them behind still not understanding about the kingdom of God which has come near to them and what they are to do. I began the framing of this sermon presenting question of the disciples as silly—I mean, we think that surely by this point they would have gotten the message. Many commentaries point out the times that Jesus rebukes them for their failures to understand—and we join in criticizing their "earthly focus". Perhaps the disciples actually have something to teach us here about our focus. The disciples, did not, could not remove their experience of the risen Christ from their own socio-cultural-political contexts. They expected that a risen Christ would indeed bring about change in those contexts. What we need to consider is whether or not we have gone too far in the other direction. Are we so focused on the spiritual and the eternal life promised that we fail to understand that we also are called to be witnesses and act for Christ here and now, where we are? Yes, this passage tells us that Christ will come again. This is wonderful news and the cause for hope that in that future time, God's reign will come fully—but what about now? When Jesus ascends into the heavens it is the first part of a transition—Jesus will no longer be with them in the same way. In the passage from Acts, as Jesus is ascending and disappearing, the disciples are left standing there looking up. I imagine this scene as them all standing there focused on this amazing sight with their jaws dropped and their mouths wide open. That brings me to what I consider another silly question found in this text. We are told that suddenly two men in white robes join them. We are not told that his surprises the disciples, it certainly would have startled me. These men are understood to be messengers from God, and are often considered angels. Their question to the disciples is: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" If you think about it, this is similar to another somewhat silly question penned by this same author. Earlier in this chapter when the women found the tomb empty of the body of Jesus, they were again asked a question by two men in dazzling robes. That

question was: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” In both cases, the messengers then give information about Jesus with which we are already familiar. At the tomb, they are told Jesus is risen; at the ascension they are told Jesus has been taken from them into heaven. Some two thousand years after these events we know the story so well that we would ask the same “why” questions of them. We believe that the women and the disciples should have already understood what was happening. As we read the gospel accounts—it is so obvious to us. In reality, of course the women went to the tomb—resurrection was not the usual outcome of death. Where do we often go in our grief over a loved one’s death? In reality, of course the disciples stood there looking up. It is what we would do if somebody began to go up into the clouds. We may be used to people ascending into the sky and clouds via an airplane, but otherwise it is not a sight that would not amaze. The disciples expected Jesus himself to do the restoring of the kingdom of God; not to leave the matter in their hands. This passage about the disciples is really about us—those who have also become disciples of Christ in a different time and place. It is about when we will be called to step out and do the work of the kingdom. That is how God has determined to work his kingdom: by our small daily efforts participating in his purpose. In doing so, we and the world are transformed. In small daily ways we are new people and there is a new world. In response to the disciples question about when God’s kingdom would be fully restored—Jesus’ answer was in terms of times or periods. From the Greek, this expression can also be understood to be seasons. That Greek word has made it into our English vocabulary as Kairos which more fully explains the meaning of what Jesus was telling the disciples. The English dictionary gives the meaning of Kairos as “a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment. In other words, it is not chronological time such as we use to keep track of hours, days, and weeks—or even years. It is God’s time, the right time. We can’t schedule it. We must simply discern it. And we must be witnesses to it. And like the disciples we are called upon to wait for God’s time remaining here. But just like the disciples waiting time had an active quality to it. They returned to Jerusalem as instructed, but did so with praise for God and were found continually in prayer. The waiting period conditions them to be attentive to God so that when the time is right, they will know what to do. They wait in a context of enormous and not fully explained expectations. They wait, not because they see it as their only option, but because they expect big things to come from God—things in which they will be privileged to be given a role. It seems important that while we anticipate and hope for the return of Christ, that we too do not sit passively waiting focused on that future which will come in God’s time. We must understand that while Christ is present with us, we are to be actively participating in the bringing of God’s kingdom near. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.