

## Why Stand Here Gazing?

Acts 1: 6-17; 21-26

Seventh Sunday after Easter, (June 5) 2011

Ascension Sunday

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It is interesting where we find ourselves when we follow the lectionary and the church liturgical calendar. Today is Ascension Sunday, with next week the birthday of the church on Pentecost Sunday. Today, the church celebrates and remembers the crucified and resurrected Christ ascended to heaven to be at the right hand of the Father.

The book of Acts begins with this dramatic moment. Jesus gives his final instructions to his disciples. He tells them to wait here. To wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit will empower them. Their job is not to take over and run the world. Their job is not to take control of the Empire. God does not call them to be better Caesars. Instead, they will be clothed with power in order that they will be witnesses of Jesus Christ. Their job – our job – is to point to Jesus Christ with all of who we are and what we do. Jesus tells the disciples to get ready, to wait for the Spirit, because the Spirit will empower them to be his witnesses – first, right around where they are, but eventually even to the wider world.

Then the book of Acts says that as they were watching him, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. Two men in white robes – just like those fellows in white who kept showing up on Easter morning around the empty tomb – suddenly stand beside them and say, “Why are you standing here looking up

toward heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way.”

After this dramatic encounter with the Lord. I mean, how many times have you seen someone ascend into heaven in a cloud and then two angels appear and start talking to you? What do the disciples do? They go back and have a church business meeting.

Talk about the mundane. Talk about the humdrum. Talk about going from the sublime to the boring. Acts tells us that the church goes from the ascension of the Risen Lord to the rather boring description of the election of Matthias as the replacement disciple/apostle of Judas. Pretty anti-climatic.

Yet no matter how dramatic and “spiritual” the experience. Even a resurrection and ascension – at some time or another we must come down to earth. Jesus Christ is in heaven but we, his disciples live here, where the chores are to be done, jobs to be filled, living together as followers of this Christ must be dealt with on Monday and Tuesday. Someone has to keep things going from Christ’s first coming and the next.

I think this story is placed here at the beginning of Acts, at the end of Eastertide, and just before Pentecost, to remind us that Jesus cares about the details of our daily living together as Christians. God cares about how we run our church, how we get together to do his work, and how we are responsible with the work he has given us to do.

In order for us to be the church of Jesus Christ on Sunday means that we have to take care of mundane business of the rest of the week. In order to be the body of Christ takes some responsibility and attentiveness to tasks, and chores, and work. Just like having a good marriage or a good family doesn’t mean that we sit

around and have Norman Rockwell moments of warmth and togetherness as much as it means that emptying the trash and washing the dishes gets done and that everyone shares the load and everyone is involved and responsible. Well, the same is with church. There is a connection between us having good worship together on Sundays and us sharing the load and being responsible together on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and so on.

It never ceases to amaze me how biblical faith, both Jewish and Christian, is about the mundane. Biblical spirituality is about everyday materiality. How we work together, how we eat, how we share finances, how we serve others in need, how we deal with conflict, how we take out the trash and wash dishes is front and center of where God is. And our overall job is to do all of these things in a way which points to the God we know in Jesus. “Yes,” we say, “the way we deal with conflict and reconciliation with one another is because of Jesus.” “Yes, the reason we’re showing up and doing the detailed, mundane, work of Vacation Bible School is because of Christ.” “Yes, the reason I keep showing up here is because I need to be here to support my sisters and brothers in Christ. It is not about me. It is about the body of Christ. It is about being witnesses of Christ Jesus.”

As we move into the summer, with all the mundane work to be done, I have some suggestions:

Wait and pray. Like the disciples here in Acts chapter one, waiting on the Lord is not passive. Waiting in the Bible is full of anticipation. You’ve heard me say again and again, waiting is like standing on a great precipice with your toes over the edge, the wind blowing in your face, and God saying, “Step out.” Waiting is about making sure God is in charge of your life – that you’re not. It is getting your priorities straight. Waiting is always waiting on God.

And waiting is about prayer. We cannot be the witnesses of Jesus Christ without the power of the living Lord among us. That takes prayer. Instead of standing on the banks gazing upward, try praying. Praying is jumping into the fast current of God and being swept away into the greatest adventure of all. Indeed, that is a great analogy of being Christian. But prayer is one of the primary ways God throws you in and sweeps you away!

Take responsibility. Be involved. When the thought comes to your mind, “Somebody ought to be doing this,” learn to say, “God might very well be calling me to do this.”

This summer, we need you to be here in worship and attentive to your financial commitments to God and to the church. And I can’t emphasize this enough – You need to be here because someone else needs your support. You need to be here because that is what it means to be responsible as a member of the body of Christ. To put some of this a little differently, pay attention to where the gaps are and then take responsibility to filling the gaps.

As we move into the summer and into a new year this coming fall, step up. One of the things I love about Austin Heights is that we know as well as most any church that it takes each and every one of us participating, giving financially, praying, and serving in order for us to be the church. What I love is that this is the description of the church in the book of Acts. Everyone steps up and is involved.

Have you ever wondered who Matthias was here in Acts 1? I have. We know he was someone who was a witness to the resurrection of Christ. Other than that, it looks like he just showed up. One day, he is going about his daily responsibilities of being a witness and all of a sudden, he finds himself be called by

the original disciples to step into the gap. He finds himself numbered among the original twelve.

Who knows what will happen we you show up around here? You never know. You just want to wade around in the shallows. All of a sudden God grabs a hold of you and throws you into the fast, deep current. You come up sputtering and coughing and find yourself being swept away. You look around at the bank shooting by, trying to get your bearings, and you see someone else's head bobbing up nearby. They look at you, laugh, and shout, "Hang on! It's the greatest rush you'll ever know! Who knows where God is taking us!"

Amen and amen.