

## **A Life of In-betweens**

Acts 1:6-14 - Ascension

### **Slide: Jesus as Lord**

“Are we there yet?” Anyone who has ever taken a long car trip with a child has heard these words, sometimes within moments of getting in the car. I can remember times when I said it to my parents as we made our way to Yellowstone National Park. The anticipation of just getting to the destination can sometimes lead to both impatience and consternation, but eventually, and in true form, once the destination is reached, the fun can be had.

But, it’s not just children who want to know how long a trip is going to take. Personally, I hate the whole preparatory stuff of traveling, especially recently. I remember feeling quite anxious about needing that negative Covid test 48 hours before landing in an airplane. So much anxiety as a trip could easily be ruined! But then the getting in the shuttle or the car, getting to the airport, checking in and finally boarding your plane, only to sit there some

more while you get to your destination. The destination is the goal, isn’t it? That in-between time stinks.

But, as an analogy, this feeling of not fully realizing a goal works for more than travel. It really is about life in general. All of us know what this between one thing and another is like. Ending a job and waiting to begin a new one, finishing the school year but not quite in the summer mode, waiting to see what college accepts you, or if the bank loan will go through, or if the diagnosis will be a good one, or if the marathon will be run full mileage. It’s almost like the journey isn’t the thing at all, the goal is.

This feeling of waiting for the outcome or the result of something, this impatient, dubious, nebulous, time before or at the end of something... It’s that in-between time that puts us all in that place of asking “Are we there yet? I just want to know if I am almost there!”

So, we just might see why it is that the disciples ask Jesus before he is taken up into the clouds and out of their sight, “Are we there yet?” Well, that really is

a paraphrase of “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel,” but essentially they are asking: Are we there? Are we finally at the time when you will redeem all your creation? Are we there yet, when you will bring your kingdom to us and give us new life? Jesus, is this finally the time?

And Jesus’ answer is the answer that a child often gets in the car on a long trip: “We will get there when we get there and no sooner than that. Oh, and by the way, only God knows when that will be. But, in the meantime, I will give you my Holy Spirit to help guide you to your next step.”

Now, I can relate to the disciples here. I really can. Three years before, Jesus tells them to follow him, they drop everything to do so, and then for those three years they witness our Lord teaching, healing, dying, raising, and then appearing to them off and on for forty days after the Resurrection. I can completely understand that it would be disappointing that that is not the end nor ultimately the goal! And, furthermore, Jesus is now leaving them alone! Their only instruction is to wait for the Holy Spirit to

come so that they can be witnesses to the Good News. How long do they wait? They have no idea how long!

And, then they look up...and they stay looking up. As Jesus goes up into the clouds, the disciples look up even after they can’t see him anymore. They aren’t ready. They don’t know what to do. They long to be there, wherever that now is, with Jesus. They want to be there already. Until an angel has to actually tell them: “Why are you doing that? You have more work to do and the Holy Spirit will tell you what it is in Jerusalem.” So, they go...only to wait for a while longer. .

So I think it is for us. Like the disciples, we are often living caught in an in-between, nebulous time, too. And, our desire to get to the goal sometimes gets in the way. Here are a few things that I think we can take from this lesson of Acts and apply it to our own lives today:

### **Heaven is not the goal.**

Heaven is the result of God’s love for us, but it is not the aim of our

whole lives. Life is too valuable to skip it all for heaven.

A friend of mine I sang in a choir with once said that she was just passing through this life on her way to Heaven. I really like my friend a lot but that makes me uncomfortable. While I agree that God has made a place for us beyond this life, to view this life as a temporary place before heaven is...well, problematic, and quite frankly, it is not biblical. However, you have probably noticed that Christians tend to focus a lot on this, even Lutheran ones. We do have many hymns that stress Heaven as the goal of life and that it's a place we look forward to going, as the wonderful old time hymn does say:

"I'll fly away O Glory; I'll fly away in the morning. When I die, Halleluiah by and by, I'll fly away."

Or one of my favorite hymns states:

"On Jordan's stormy banks I stand, and cast a wishful eye to Canann's fair and happy land, where my possessions lie. I am bound for the Promised Land,

who will come and go with me? I am bound for the Promised Land."

But to live one's life as if Heaven was the primary goal of life, then we have certainly missed the point and we would miss out on the importance of this life God has given us. The promise of Heaven certainly is a part of our faith, but it is not the only part. I completely understand the desire to be in eternal life with God, especially when horrible events occur - war, mass shootings again and again, and I also understand that people long for heaven when they suffer or are in pain, and indeed, there are times when we look forward to that place where no pain, mourning, nor weeping will be no more. That desire in itself is beautiful.

Yet, as this bible reading in Acts teaches us, if we are constantly looking up, complacent about what happens here, waiting everything out, longing to be with Jesus all the time, we cannot see our neighbor who is next to us. Nor can we see what the purpose of our lives is in this world now, today, and for the sake of the Gospel. God loves and redeems all of creation around us. A piece of Heaven is here now for us to

see and experience. And, as I mentioned in my sermon last week, that piece of home, being with God is only one breath, one prayer away. Despite the difficulties life brings, the Kingdom of God, although not fully disclosed, is here now, too, and we ought to treat creation as if it were. For, if we treat the world around us as “well, I have Heaven already” so what do I care what happens, we lose out on God’s purposes for God’s own creation, and we especially lose out on the importance of loving our neighbor.

**Secondly, the waiting, the in-between times in life are important.**

I know how very hard it is to not know what to do next. In this culture of instant self-gratification, where you can see your latest email in seconds and post instant memories on Instagram, we are becoming a people unused to having to wait for anything to happen. But, let me tell you, the disciples had to wait for that promised Holy Spirit to come after Jesus left them physically for good. How long did they wait? Although it was about ten days, they did not know how long it

would be. And, their response was to join together in community and spend time in prayer.

Whenever a time in your life is like that, when you don’t know what your next step in life ought to be, whether to buy a home, begin a new job, start retirement, or decide on a college, it might be hard for you to consider that the in-between time is just when God is trying to lead you most.

Let’s not mistake this lesson in Acts as a lesson only about how to witness to the Gospel and what you should be doing in and for the church. God wants to lead you in everything you do in life. The decisions you make for your family, for yourself, and for your neighbor actually are important to God, too, for the here and now. And the Holy Spirit has a plan for you not only as a disciple, but as a friend, mother or father, and co-worker, maybe now even an advocate for victims of gun violence.

And, those “decision making” times in life, where to go next or where not to go next, are times when God is often really active. We may already want to be at the goal in our desire to

know what is ahead of us, but God may want us to stay in the in-between for a while instead. That is why having a community of faith you can worship with can be so helpful during times of decision making, a place where people support you in making those decisions and pray for you, so that when the time comes to move forward, we can all celebrate with you.

**Lastly, Jesus has not left us alone.**

It may seem that in this reading from Acts that Jesus floats away from the disciples never to be seen again. It really does look like he has left them alone. But, they are not alone. As we hear in the Gospel reading for today, Jesus will be with and in them as Spirit. He will never leave them. He has poured out his Spirit on them and us, so that we all may know that God is present with us along the way.

Furthermore, we have signs of Christ's presence here...in bread, wine, water, word, and the neighbor that make up the Body of Christ in the world, so that we may receive the strength we need to stop looking up all the time toward heaven and instead look

around to God's hopes and intentions for us here and now.

Therefore, if Christ is truly present and has not left us alone like he promised, where is he in your life made manifest?

In others?

In church?

In creation or in your recreation?

In your children or godchildren, parent or spouse?

Where is Christ's Holy Spirit present in your life?

For life is full of 'in-between's'. It can be difficult to trust in that given that we often just want to skip to the end. But, life isn't always about our goals but more often about the journey itself.

So, how is your journey going?  
Are you finding yourself too often looking up?

Because Christ is here

...in you

...in your life

...and has promised never to leave you from the start, to the end...

...and the times in-between.

Amen.