

Acts 1:6-14  
Psalm 68:1-10, 53-55

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11  
John 17:1-11

Jesus did it again! There is now another new twist for the disciples. This last Thursday was Ascension Day, the day that Jesus left his disciples to ascend into heaven. It wasn't easy following this Jesus. They traveled with this man Jesus for three years. They were constantly misunderstanding Jesus, often times they could not or would not understand what he was teaching them. How many times did Jesus not chastise them? There was the excitement of Palm Sunday, when the people were excited about Jesus entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. But, within five days, it all goes south. They witness their master being mistreated by the religious Jewish authorities and then crucified by the Roman authorities. They witnessed Jesus dying in one of the most horrific ways possible. Just when it seemed like it was all coming to an end, they witness a resurrected Lord in just a few days. Yet, in forty days Jesus leaves them. They never knew what to expect from Jesus. The question now is, What now?

They still do not get it. Before Jesus ascends, they ask him, "Lord, is this the time you will restore the kingdom to Israel." They were hoping for a restored kingdom; like it was under their greatest king, David. They were hoping for political strength, prosperity, and freedom from their Roman oppressors. Jesus response? It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses...." They misunderstood Jesus ministry. Now Jesus leaves them and they are left alone.

Gazing up into the sky, they may very well have been wondering, "What now?" What are they going to do now? Two men in white declare to them, "Why do you stand

looking up toward heaven? This Jesus ... will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." But, the question remains, "What now?"

That continues to be the question today. What now? We are still expecting the return of Jesus Christ. It does not mean trying to figure out when Jesus is returning and how it will happen. Given the popularity of interpretations of the Middle Eastern crisis the Left Behind series of books, and conferences on biblical prophecy, it seems like these so-called experts have it figured out. Did not Jesus say to the apostles in our passage, "It is not for you to know the times or periods." Jesus says it is not for us to know so why do so many spend so much time trying to figure it out? So, what now?

The question for us in this in-between time is not how is Jesus going to return. The question is, how are we going to live in this in-between time. Life is full of twists and turns. Just when we think we have it all figured out, something happens. Life is going well, and then a loved one is facing a serious illness. We think we finally have our act together, only to find out the company is being bought out, and there are no promises for job security. We finally manage to get our finances put together, and we are faced with a huge bill for a home repair. As I heard in chapel one day when I was in college, life is just one darn thing after another. Every morning we get up, we exercise, we get ready for work, we work, we go home at the end of the day, we spend the evening doing errands or chores around the house, and we finally get to bed. Only to repeat it again tomorrow. One darn thing after another. Our lives may be so hectic we just want to yell, Stop the world and get me off. Like the disciples, we gaze off, wondering, What now?

Can we expect anything better? Daniel Migliore, a Presbyterian seminary professor wrote, "Christian faith is expectant faith. It eagerly awaits the completion of

the creative and redemptive activity of God.” Ours is an expectant faith. The apostles were expecting Jesus to return again. We expect Jesus to return again. As one commentator wrote, “God’s people have always been “on their way,” fervently anticipating the fulfillment of the promise.” It is an expectant faith that helps us deal with the anxiety of now, the anxiety of what is next.

For many of us, our ancestors had an expectant faith. Recently I started to do some genealogical research on my maternal grandparents. They immigrated to rural Otley, Iowa, from the Netherlands, immigrated in the fall of 1913. I am sure, their journey from their homes to a new land wasn’t exactly exciting. Just like life, their journey was one darn thing after another.

The immigrants who came to our nation in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, and passed through Ellis Island traveled in “steerage.” If you were a first or second class passenger, you were allowed to pass inspection aboard ship and go directly ashore. However, steerage passengers had to take the ferry to Ellis Island for inspection. Riding steerage was far from a pleasant trip. Often times, when they arrived at their port of embarkation, they would have to wait days, weeks, even months, either for their paperwork to be completed or for their ship to arrive. There was also a medical examination before they could board the ship. They traveled in dark, crowded conditions near the bottom of steamships with few amenities, often spending up to two weeks seasick in their bunks during the rough Atlantic Ocean crossings. There was no air-conditioning and it could be very hot. Many traveled through hazardous weather. The trip included substandard food and sanitation conditions. For many in steerage, it was a nightmare and at times the mortality rate was ten percent!

When the ships arrived, they would dock at the Hudson or East River piers. Quarantine officers would come on board to check for signs of epidemic diseases. The steerage passengers were then transported from the pier by ferry or barge to Ellis Island. These barges could be so crowded it was hard to move. On Ellis Island they were medically inspected and some had to have a more thorough inspection. There was legal inspection. After a few hours, the immigrant was free to go. About two percent of the immigrants would fail to be admitted and were deported. The next stop was the railroad ticket office. Again the immigrants would wait until they were ferried on barges to the train terminals in Jersey City or Hoboken to reach their destinations.

Why would these people go through such an experience? To say the least, these were no luxury cruise. These people left their homelands, their families, knowing that they may never see their family members again. They endured the hardships of crossing the ocean in terrible conditions. They were not even sure they would be allowed in to this country where the streets were paved with gold. Why? Because it was an expectant journey. They were expecting a better life. Most were fleeing religious persecution, political oppression, and economic hardships. They endured all of this because they were expecting a better future.

When we say Jesus is coming again, we are saying something better is coming. We are saying the future is in God's hands. We keep going because ours is an expectant faith. We may not have the answer to the question, "what now?" But we do know the future is in God's hands.

Blessed be the Lord, who has given us  
a new birth into a living hope,  
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.