

being called to do? Who are you being called to disciple? Where are you being called to go? What are you being called to sacrifice? Who is it that you are being called to follow? Because, if you are being called to follow the risen Christ, then you are being called to lay down your life.

He's coming back, and we have work to do.



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Looking To The Sky

Acts 1:6-14

TRINITY PULPIT

It has been forty days. Forty days since they watched Jesus die and they then saw His resurrected body complete with the nail scars. A disciple or two would be going about their day, and suddenly a man they knew to be Jesus would appear to talk for a while and then move on to reveal Himself to another unsuspecting group of disciples. During these forty days the hesitant excitement grew - could it really be true that it did not all end when the Romans nailed Him to that cross? Could He really have risen from the dead? He has shown us His ability to preform miracles, and now this? Has He really conquered death? What's next?

As Jesus' time on earth drew to a close, He made sure to leave His disciples with a very clear mission, for it would be some time before He returned in body to speak with them again. As they all stood out on that Galilean mountain in awe of their resurrected Lord, most of the disciples worshipped, but still some just could not bring themselves to believe what they were clearly seeing. To those who would remain faithful, Jesus gave His charge: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age."

Jesus met with them and taught them about the kingdom and commanded them to wait for their baptism by the

Holy Spirit. And, still some just could not get it. Some still were not clear on Jesus' message and purpose - the kingdom of God. They could not understand that Jesus' purpose was higher and greater than the restoration of an earthly kingdom - that His kingdom was cosmic and eternal. That with this kingdom and its restoration came great responsibility on the disciples' part - that they were co-laborers in its establishment and completion. And, that they, flawed disciples - sinners, were to be witnesses for Jesus to all the ends of the earth.

And, just as soon as He said these things, before they had a chance to blink or to question, Jesus in his resurrected, nail-scarred body was taken up into heaven and a cloud hid Him from their sight. While their eyes were still wide and fixed on the sky, mouths agape, two men dressed in white appeared standing next to them and asked them, "What are you doing standing here looking up at the sky? Don't you know that the Man you just watched ascend to heaven will be coming back?" All seeming to imply, He's coming back and you have work to do, but here you are still staring into the sky!

We've all been in this place at some point or another - overwhelmed at the task before us, paralyzed not knowing where to even begin. Or maybe it was even more basic than that - utter shock at the fact that they had just seen a Man that they once thought to be dead, then found to be alive, levitating into heaven. Their amazement is more than understandable, and their fear for the task at hand completely relatable.

I think often we forget that these disciples were not super human. They had no special abilities - no gift of foresight that kept them from asking the same questions over and over again. The disciples were young men who knew no luxury but the luxury of hard work. They knew very little education but the education of Jesus' witness and teachings. They knew no privilege but the privilege of knowing the Living Christ.

Now, let's put ourselves in the sandals of the disciples. Would we be immediately moved and motivated to complete the mission laid before us, or would we be standing with our mouths open and our eyes wide looking to the sky to see where our risen Lord had gone to? I know my mouth would be hanging. Honestly, I'm quite sure I would have jumped out of my skin when the two men in white appeared from nowhere and spoke to me. Believe me. Just ask the staff. They have learned that they have to announce their presence before they reach my door and start talking, just so I will not fall out of my chair. I'm a little jumpy.

Yes, the disciples had the privilege of seeing Jesus and His miracles and hearing His teachings firsthand. And, yes, they had a clear and present mission laid before them. But, can we really blame the disciples for being a little daunted by the task?

When we come to the Scriptures, we come to a living text - one that is not just a record of history for God's people in one particular culture and context, but it is the text that breathes into our lives. These passages and commands to the disciples are not for particular people who have lived and since died almost 2,000 years ago. These commands are for the particular and peculiar people who choose to follow Christ throughout time. These commands are just as imperative in our lives and purpose today as they were for James, Bartholomew, Simon, Philip, Thaddeus, Thomas, Matthew, Peter, the other James, John, and Andrew.

And, we having 2,000 years of Church history on our side, having the privilege of hindsight, and having every opportunity in the world for joining hands with God in his mission and

purpose, we are still standing here mouths agape staring into the sky. We know the Greatest Commandment and the Second, we can recite the Great Commission by heart, we can retell the Bible stories in our sleep; yet, we are no better at following His commands today than we were yesterday. Instead we, the consumers that we are, keep coming back to Jesus asking the same questions getting the same answers and moving very little. For the most part, we treat our faith selfishly - it is our faith, we must be fed spiritually, and maybe if we have a free afternoon we can volunteer an hour or two of our time and call it a day for living out the Great Commission. Let's be honest with ourselves, we spend more time looking to the sky than living out our faith. We spend more time pontificating on our own political views or petty woes than preaching the gospel and making disciples.

The implication of this text today is that "if you build it they will come" is not the way it works around here. We cannot simply assume that if we have enough bells and whistles that the lost will wander in off of the street and come to know the Lord. If we keep with that mentality, then we are just looking to the sky.

The implication of this text is this: "He's coming back, and you have work to do! Get moving! Get out there! Preach the Gospel and share the hope that you have found in our resurrected Lord!" Don't keep that to yourself. This is not about you. This is about His Kingdom.

Our college team has just returned last week from ten days in Kenya. Ten days away from iPhones and Instagram. Ten days away from academic stress, financial stress, relational stress. Ten days with one purpose: to share the Gospel. It was truly a privilege and a gift. Because, to be honest... real life creeps in and clouds our ability to stay true to the task at hand. While we were in Kenya, we did not have the luxury or the crutch of "prep time," but we were often presented with our task just as it was ready for us to take on. A five-minute warning for your next sermon will teach you to lean on the Holy Spirit pretty effectively. Our team was ministered to in ways that we can only begin to explain. But one of the most striking things that will go with us was

the sense of urgency for the gospel.

In the first day of ministry, we saw over 200 people accept Christ just after a short sermon, a couple of songs, prayer, and a simple invitation. There were very few if any (I do not know of any) houses that we walked into for evangelism that we walked out of with the residents having not prayed to accept Christ. And, each day of ministry was just like that. Our team had a hard time comprehending what was happening. We did not have a framework to help us understand

that people would (1) let you come into their homes and schools to talk about the Gospel and (2) accept your testimony as truth and pray for Christ to dwell in their hearts right then and there. It just did not compute in what we know as reality in our American culture. If you can get someone to answer the door when you knock unannounced, it is very unlikely here in America that they, not having faith in Christ, would welcome

you into their living room to have further conversation on the subject. Most likely what would happen is that they would see you coming down the street, tell their children not to make any noise or walk past the window, and hope that the missionaries would just go away. Our hearts are so hardened and our egos are so big that we just do not have a sense of urgency when it comes to working out our salvation. We pride ourselves so much on our own self-reliance, that we cannot think that we would need a savior outside of ourselves. And, I am not just talking about the un-churched, un-saved Americans. I am talking about you and me. Most of us, me included, look at God everyday and say in our best two-year-old voice "I do it myself." That is, isn't it, the root of every sin - the decision to chose our way over God's way?

GOD'S WAY IS HARD BECAUSE WE HAVE TO RELY ON HIM. WE CANNOT RELY ON OURSELVES, BECAUSE WE WILL FAIL. GOD'S WAY IS HARD BECAUSE IT CALLS US OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE AND CALLS US INTO CHRIST'S SUFFERING. IT REQUIRES ALL OF US TO GIVE UP THE ONE THING THAT WE ARE STILL HOLDING ON TO - THE THING THAT STANDS IN OUR WAY TO HAVING A FULL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

God's way is hard because we have to rely on Him. We cannot rely on ourselves, because we will fail. God's way is hard because it calls us out of our comfort zone and calls us into Christ's suffering. It requires all of us to give up the one thing that we are still holding on to - the thing that stands in our way to having a full relationship with Christ. It requires us to begin to understand that our faith cannot be lived out in a vacuum because when we are called into relationship with God we are called into relationship with relationships - relationship with the Triune God and with His

people - all of them. It requires us to carry the same purpose, the same plan, and the same burden for the world that Christ carried to the cross. It calls us to take up our cross and follow Jesus. It calls us to wrap a towel around our waist and wash the feet of the broken. It calls us to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, visit the sick and imprisoned and lonely. It calls us to love the unlovely. It calls us to our own cross - our own sacrifice.

I guess it's a little easier to star gaze.

Ascension Sunday could, in some ways, look like the close to one chapter and the beginning to another. And in some ways it is. It is the close to Jesus' earthly life, and it is the beginning of the church's real need to walk by faith and not by sight. But, Ascension Sunday is more than a nice story - a nice transition from part one to part two. Ascension Sunday is a mirror. It is a calling out. It is a firm reminder that Jesus' work is not done, and we are the ones who are to join hands with Him and to complete it.

So, why, O Church, do you stand here looking to the sky? Don't you know that our Christ is returning, and your mission field lies just beyond those doors? There is a lost and lonely world out there in desperate need of hope - and that hope that only comes from knowing the Savior. We are all called to do something. What are you
