

MESSAGE – Getting On With It

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SCRIPTURE Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

SCRIPTURE Acts 1:1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit."

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This

same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

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I wasn't here last Sunday because – as a lot of people are experiencing right now – I had a family graduation to go to: Miriam graduated from North Central College with a double major in anthropology and religious studies. But it wasn't one, but two graduations I had...for the Friday before, Moriah graduated from University of Illinois Chicago with a masters of social work. Needless to say – it was a proud mama weekend! Today we celebrate all those who have completed a course of study. And I recognize that those graduating in these few years – whether from high school or college or higher – the years they went through were some of the most unique and challenging times because of COVID. They learned not only their studies, but how to adapt and endure.

But even with their unique circumstances, they have all been asked the same question that every high school and college graduate faces: *Now what? What are you going to do now? Where does this lead you?*

Making graduation a two-fold event: it is an ending as well as a beginning.

Ending the season of focused learning and studies

And beginning the next season of more studies or working in a particular field....or something else perhaps.

I get the feeling that those first disciples faced the same kind of questions after Jesus' death and resurrection.

*Now what? What are we going to do now? Where is this going to lead us?*

They had been in their own whirlwind of unique and challenging circumstances:

having chosen to follow Jesus

being on the ground floor of an amazing ministry experience,

having their hopes built that the world's power circumstances were going to be changed by him,

then being struck by his surprising crucifixion

then the even more puzzling experience of him being alive.

It was a lot to say the least. Trying to make sense of it all; figuring out what it all meant.

And then they had the final face-to-face experience with Jesus. Kind of like a graduation ceremony where professors look out at their students who have completed their courses. And Jesus gives them final instructions before being taken away from them.

The telling from the book of Acts includes a scene in which two men in white appear to the disciples and say, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?"

It was their equivalent of the questions for today's graduates that is asked with the expectation that simply standing there at the completion or ending is not enough...there needs to be the beginning of something next; in other words, they need to get on with it.

They needed to get on with what Jesus had instructed them:

- 1) To preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. Luke: "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

During Lent – the lead up to Easter, we spent a lot of time learning all the ways that we come to understand what redemption means; what happened on the cross of Christ. Substitution atonement; ransom; moral example; reconciliation; cleansing and Christ the victor.

They each took a look at a different angle:

Substitution atonement: there's a punishment that needs to be paid that we cannot survive; so God takes the punishment for us.

Ransom: sin is the captor/oppressor that we need to be rescued from

Moral example: the cross is the highest example of agape love

Reconciliation: the relationship between God and humanity that is broken is repaired

Cleansing: sin renders us unclean...the blood of Christ cleanses us.

Christ the victor: our ultimate enemy and the result of our sin (death) is defeated

While they each focus on a little different angle, they all boil down to what Jesus says to the disciples before he left:

Something is wrong that needs to be addressed

That the way of death needs to be replaced by the way of life; you can't walk both paths.

Those early disciples were to get on with it and proclaim this new way of life in Jesus.

And so are we.

- 2) To be witnesses to his resurrection. Acts: "and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

They had experienced something incredible. Something impossible. Something that people had only hoped in but hadn't experienced as real: that there is a new reality after death.

In short, they are responsible for what they have learned.

Much like the graduates of today who have learned their course lessons, they now are meant to go forth and share what they've learned.

Imagine if they didn't.

Imagine people who go to med school or nursing school and don't share the life-saving information they have with patients.

Imagine people who study mechanical engineering and don't apply it in their work.

Imagine those who learn about history and don't share the kind of information that might keep us from repeating history.

If they don't use what they've learned - what was the point of learning it?

That's what Jesus is getting at here. They had learned life-saving/life-changing information that death isn't the last hold; that death doesn't speak the final words, but rather life does. Imagine if they'd kept it all to themselves. Would we be here?

Those disciples were meant to get on with it and share the good news they'd experienced.

And so are we.

- 3) To help others follow Jesus. Matthew's gospel: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Some of the most humbling moments I have is when my intelligent and educated children school me in something that I think I know. Moriah knows so much about social issues. Miriam has studied religious studies. I think I know these topics pretty well. But many times, I find that those students have now become my teacher.

Which is exactly what those disciples; those first students of Jesus had to do: become the teachers. Teach others what Jesus has taught about love and forgiveness and the way of life.

And it wasn't always received well. Because some folks don't want to learn. The disciples learned that. They spoke about Jesus' resurrection to the same people who were responsible for Jesus' death.

They weren't excited to learn this from Stephen; from Peter; nor from one of their own: Paul.

Nevertheless, they, the students, were to go and become the teachers. And so are we.

Today as we recognize Ascension Sunday....when Jesus ascends, returns, to heaven, I wonder if we find that the church of today is much like those early disciples, looking up and hearing the question of the angels: "why do you stand looking at the sky?"

I wonder, if the church of today needs a bit of prodding like they did to "get on with it". What do you think?

Is there something we need to be doing more?

Is there something we need to be doing better?

Is there something we need to keep doing that we've stopped doing?

I'd love to have those conversations with you.