

7th Sunday of Easter: Acts 1:6-14; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11; Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36

Why did Jesus ascend to heaven? Why? Why did he not stay on earth after the resurrection and establish his Kingdom right then and there? I mean, the disciples wanted to know the answer to this question. Given today in our scripture reading from Acts, the disciples ask Jesus, “Is this the time when you will restore the Kingdom to Israel?” But so, what Kingdom are they asking about? Well...the kingdom of God on earth. The Jews were waiting for the Kingdom of God to be restored to Israel physically upon this earth since they were promised Messiah would reign forever out of Zion. Zion is the City of David in Jerusalem. God speaks to us in Psalm 132:13 and 14 saying: “For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His home: This is my resting place forever and ever; here I will dwell, for I have desired this home.” And in Psalm 2:6-8, God the Father in speaking of Jesus says: “I have installed my king in Zion...You are my son, today I have become your father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession.” And again, in 2 Samuel 7:10-13, the Lord tells the prophet Nathan that in regards to Israel a time will come when wicked people will not oppress them anymore and to tell King David: “The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son.” Jesus’ genealogy is traced back to King David through both Mary and Joseph in the Gospel of Luke. And also, by the time of our reading today from Acts, the disciples would have known by now, from Mother Mary, the conversation of the Angel Gabriel who during the Annunciation declared to her: “You will...give birth to a son, and you are to all him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” This is the same revelation that Peter confesses when Christ asks him, “Who do people say the Son of Man is, and Peter responds saying: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”

And so, we see that God the Father revealed in scripture that all things will become subject to God the Son who will reign on this present earth from Zion, the throne of David in Israel. The Jewish Disciples know this from many prophecies about Messiah who is to come to reign. And so today, the disciples ask Jesus: "Is this the time when you will restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Which is a logical question. Jesus had died and resurrected and so they know him to be the promised Messiah, the Lord, who was clearly God because nobody can (a) can resurrect from the dead but God and (b) nobody can reign forever unless they be eternal and so they had every reason to believe the coming of the actual Kingdom of God on earth should happen next. Given Jesus, being God, could reign forever.

But how does Jesus respond to their question? Jesus says to them: "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority." And so, Jesus does not say, "No, I'm not gonna ever reign on earth from Israel." Jesus doesn't correct them and deny that he is going to restore the Kingdom to Israel and reign. Jesus says it is not for you to know the time. And he also doesn't say, "Yes, I'm going to set up the Kingdom on earth right now. Watch me." But rather Jesus appears to indicate that His reign on earth will happen, but not now. Jesus reveals this should not be their concern right now. But so, what is to be the concern of the disciples right now? Well, Jesus tells them what they should be concerned about by explaining to them: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." Jesus indicates he is not going to reign now on earth, but that they, the disciples will receive God's Holy Spirit who will empower them to be witnesses.

Which affirms what Jesus says at the last supper when he tells the disciples he is going away. Jesus says: "I tell you the truth, it is for your benefit that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." And so, Jesus left in order to send the Holy Spirit. And so, think about this. Jesus left to be an administrator. Being an administrator is no small thing. He left to be in charge of something especially important from the realm of heaven because Jesus had just ushered in the New Covenant for which he is the Overseer in heaven. He left to become our Great High Priest, in charge of overseeing and praying for us and granting us gifts and giving us direction and

sending us his very Spirit in order to do the good that God is working within our hearts to accomplish the bearing of fruit for the Kingdom in heaven. Because of the New Covenant that was established by Jesus paying for our sins. Jesus could now send the Holy Spirit to indwell us. Something Holy cannot indwell something unholy. Psalm 5:4 says: "For You are not a God who delights in wickedness; no evil can dwell with You." God cannot dwell with evil. But Jesus cleansed us from all unrighteousness removing our sins from us so that the Holy Spirit is able to indwell us. This is the New Covenant. This is what we are about to celebrate at Pentecost. Not laws written on scrolls and stones that we try to obey but cannot, but rather the New Covenant as prophesized in Jeremiah 31:33-34 where God says: "The days are coming," declares the lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to^[a] them,^[b]" declares the LORD. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

And so, do you see it? Jesus had just ushered in the New Covenant whereby because God was able to forgive and remember our sins no more. Jesus, who knew no sin, becoming sin for us, so that his law is now written upon our hearts via the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In order that we may know God. But so why did Jesus have to go, or leave the earth, in order to send the Holy Spirit? Could Jesus have not done this simultaneously while setting up the Kingdom? Well, yes. But as Jesus says today, God the Father sets the times. And so why would God the Father want for more time between the establishment of the New Covenant and the coming Kingdom?

Well, I believe, that Jesus gives us a clue as to why this may be, because he is telling his disciples that a time has now come for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to empower them to witness. And what is the purpose of witnessing? The purpose of witnessing is so that others will be born of the Holy Spirit. Jesus

tells us, that unless people are born of water and the spirit, they cannot enter the kingdom of God, (John 3:5). To be born of God's Holy spirit is to become born of God. To become God's child. And so, I believe, that the time being given since Christ's ascension may be because God the Father wants more children. When Jesus talks about bearing fruit and a harvest, what else does this pertain to if not more children of God? God is our Father who wants to love and be in fellowship and reign with his children for eternity! Jesus tells us today that God the Father has given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you the Father has given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Says Jesus. Jesus has been given charge over all people so that they may come to know God the Father and Jesus whom he has sent so that they may be born of the family of God and receive eternal life. And so, this time period that God has set, this is the time to be baptizing people into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them what Christ has taught us, because by believing and being baptized we are born of God. We become born from above and become eternal children of God when we believe and receive what our Father has extended to us in Christ's redemptive work on the cross. That we are children of God is why Jesus teaches us to call God Father. And we become children of God just as Jesus commissions in the Gospel of Matthew saying, "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, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." I believe this would be why Jesus did not set up the Kingdom right then because the coming Kingdom on earth of Israel, according to scripture, will last 1,000 years, and then the New Heaven and the New Earth will be established with the New Jerusalem descending from heaven and there will be no more death. But there will also be no more birth. Jesus says to us, that in heaven, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage for you will be like the angels. Angels do not have children. Right now, in this time period between the ascension and the return of Jesus is the time for souls to be born unto eternal life by becoming children of God forever. Now is the time for children to not only be born physically, but to also be born of God. To be born from above. God is permitting time for this. Jesus says this in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, i.e., that we are growing together so that there will be a harvest. There are weeds growing in this world, but God wants to see as much

wheat as possible. The wheat being children born of God. Weeds become wheat by being born of God. And if Jesus had not ascended but established the kingdom right then, the time for wheat to grow in order to be harvested would have ended.

Hebrews 2:10 tells us: “It was fitting that God,^{*} for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” Jesus came and died to bring many children to glory. God wants many children. God created everything to exist to include the heavens and the earth and all that is in them to have children. To have you. And so, God sent Jesus to provide for God’s indwelling in order to bring many children to glory. That is why I believe God is giving us time.

And Jesus is administering this new time period. The Church Age. As the head of the church. We are told directly in Colossians 1:18 that Jesus is the head of the church. And so, Jesus is our administrator in heaven. This is what Jesus left to do. Everything we do as Christians and as a body of believers and as this parish, we need to be looking towards our administrator, Jesus Christ, asking “Lord, what would you have us do?” Given Jesus has told us, that if we do this, we will do even greater things than he did and also whatever we ask in his name, He will do. That is a pretty empowering thing to understand, and this is the power that Jesus is telling his disciples, today, that he will next send! Jesus went to be our High Priest interceding for us before the Father and sending us our gifts and talents, and hearing and answering prayers, and giving us callings because Jesus is not just sitting at the right hand of God on a silken pillow eating bon bons – he is running his worldwide Church. His called-out ones. *Us*. Equipping us to do the very thing he commissioned the original Apostles to do. To go out and seek to bring more children into God’s kingdom. And raise *them* up to do likewise, and so on, until Jesus returns. Because the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. And as faithful servants entrusted with this highest of all possible commissions now, we will also be entrusted with overseeing much in the coming ages. We are told of this today if you read the daily lectionary readings. This morning in Ephesians we read: “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ^{*}—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly

places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.” In other words, God loved us, sent his Son to save us, to seat us even now with him in the heavenly places, meaning we are already beginning to reign with him because we are part of the advancing Kingdom and are working for God’s kingdom, so that in the ages to come his children will receive kindness. And note that he says ages, not just age. There is more than one age to come. We are not only working for the Kingdom of heaven in this Church Age, but we will also reign with Jesus in the millennial kingdom on earth and then also on the new heaven and the new earth. Because children of a King inherit a kingdom. This is what scripture teaches us.

Jesus did not set up the Kingdom, but ascended to oversee the work of the Church, so that there may be many more children born into the family of God. And we are an integral part of that Great Commission. *Amen.*