

# *Sermon Text for July 29, 2019*

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

*Isaiah 6:1-8, Acts 1:6-14*

“Is it time?”

A few years back I went to the doctor’s office to have a small cancer spot taken off my chest. Not a big deal, but it was the first time I ever had a doctor cut into me so I was nervous. Some of you know about my low tolerance for anything medical, so you can imagine my surprise when they told me that I was not going to be put under for such a small procedure. I asked if it was going to hurt and the doctor said it might make my eyes water. Great. The nurse came in with a packet of tools, there was a scalpel, tweezers, a prodding instrument. Great. They told me, don’t move during this procedure. Then the doctor took out a needle and said I’m going to have to give you about 8 shots to make sure the area all around is numb.

By then I’m sweating, my eyes are rolling back into my head, and the doctor hasn’t even done anything yet. Finally, he cuts into me, first with the shots, then he cut and pulled and prodded and stitched. It was not pleasant, but the absolute worst part was the anticipation leading up to it. I was prepared, braced for it, maybe a bit too much. Acts chapter 1 is all about anticipation and what do we do, what is our responsibility during this time of anticipation for the coming of the kingdom of God.

We will find disciples climbing those stairs again to the upper room to meet up with all the other believers, including Jesus’ mother and his brothers and in that room bracing themselves, waiting, anticipating for the power of the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus to come upon them. We will find that they were not waiting idly by, or just closing their eyes and bearing it, no, we will see what they were doing while they were waiting which is a call to us to do the same.

## **READ SCRIPTURE**

I wonder if Jesus wanted to pull his hair out. For three years he had been teaching his disciples about the Kingdom of God, that is was going to be something that they had never experienced before, but had caught glimpses of it while Jesus was in their midst. But look what happens once Jesus dies in Luke’s first volume, that is the Gospel of Luke, turn to chapter 24 vs. 21 and we hear these disciples saying to one another as they are

dejected and saddened, and we thought that he was the one to bring about this kingdom. We had hoped he was the one.

Now this is before Jesus made himself known to them. In Acts we find him with his disciples after they had spent 40 days together so you'd think they would have finally gotten it right? Wrong. The very last words that we hear them say to Jesus in this 2 volume work is: Is this the time that you are going to restore the kingdom of Israel? John Calvin says that there are as many errors in this question as there are words. I don't know where to begin. You know they said something wrong by Jesus' answer to them: It is none of your business. You are not to know the time or the season. It's none of your business. You have more important matters to concern yourselves with.

What was so wrong with that final question? Let's start with the word restore, will you restore. Restore implies that there had been at one time a kingdom and now Jesus has come to put it back in place. The kingdom of God is like nothing that has ever existed on the face of the earth. It is one of a kind, it is where the Prince of Peace will reign, there will be no weeping and tears will be dried. The Kingdom of God is unprecedented and can only be brought about by God, it is not even close to any earthly kingdom that this world may have seen.

The disciples also imply that the kingdom is going to be one for the nation of Israel. They still didn't get that it wasn't about them and it wasn't about establishing a political nation for a certain race of people. We hear that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, not just the people of Israel. What am I going to do with you, you can probably hear Jesus say. His response redirects their attention away from their supposed task to the mission at hand. Don't worry about this earth, your mission is not to worry about when and where, but the kingdom of God I will give to a faithful people.

After he tells them not to worry about when it is going to take place he reassures them that they will receive the power from the Holy Spirit in a short time. He then goes off into the clouds and the disciples are left standing around. Two men in white appear and say: what are you looking at? Jesus is going to come back just as he left, get to work. Isn't there something you should be doing? It has not been a good day for the disciples. Why is everyone always picking on me. At this point they go back to Jerusalem, like Jesus told them to do, and wait for the Holy spirit which Jesus had promised he would send them.

You can imagine that the disciples were also feeling a bit overtasked. They did not want to have the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was going to send them, they wanted Jesus himself, which is why they probably were hanging around looking up into the sky, hoping he would come back and do the work himself. Now the biggest mistake was that they thought Jesus was going to do it all. And of course he has, but not the way they thought. The work of the Kingdom was only going to be accomplished if the disciples of Jesus fulfilled the commission of Jesus.

These disciples always get their mistakes pointed out, but then they finally get it right. They go back, like Jesus told them to Jerusalem and wait. As Isaiah states in 40:31 those who wait upon the Lord will mount up with wings like eagles, and we see that they do.

I want to focus on that part of the disciples' question that today we are facing and the very mistake that they made we may potentially make as well. As I mentioned last week we are the next generation of this church. What I mean by that is that we are those, who like the disciples, are faced with daunting tasks and we are called to recognize that God is indeed working through us. Those who have gone before us have set the stage, but now it is time for us to get on stage and do that which God would want us to do.

People are asking all around us. Is this the apocalypse? Is the world coming to an end? Is the United States seeing the beginning of the end just like the people in the Roman Empire were asking if they were seeing the beginning of the end. Jesus answers us, it is none of your business and don't waste your time trying to figure that out. There are certain areas in our walk with Christ which we will never know, such as when is the time that Jesus calls us back. With the events that are happening in the world around us, we feel like it is time, wars, floods, fires, earthquakes.

But we are not called to stand around and look up into the sky gawking and waiting and looking for signs. But rather Isaiah shows us how we ought to respond in such a time as this. We find ourselves thinking like the disciples by focusing only on what is happening to us and around us. Isaiah was called to go out into the world and he responded and made himself available by stating, here I am. Jesus gave his disciples a great commission by telling them: get what you need in Jerusalem and then go out into the world.

But we are more inclined to think locally when God calls us to think globally. We become so focused on what is happening right here in this little, mostly white and fairly well off First Presbyterian that we forget how passionate God is for Mexicans and those from Latin America, Syrians, and people from Myanmar. We think that whatever God wants to do, we expect him to do it and we forget that God usually chooses to do his work through people. If we refuse to act or act ineffectively, the result of that can be harmed or delayed.

I get so caught up in excitement and enthusiasm that when things start to happen quickly I jump on board and try to get behind it and get others behind it as well. We have cranked up the increase giving committee and I'm excited not because we are going to be knocking on your doors asking for money, but I am excited to see how God is going to provide in a way that shocks all of us. So I jump on board and can't wait to be a part of that group. But then I was reminded by this Scripture, we are not yet in Acts 2. We are tempted to skip Acts 1 and move to the blessing of the Holy Spirit without doing the preparatory work that the disciples did in Acts 1. What am I talking about?

After seeing Jesus off did they go back to that upper room and start organizing and forming committees? Did they say, you Mary and your sons go to this region, we will cover that area? No, look at verse 14. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer. Prayer, I think, is an element that is easily overlooked as things start to move. It was in prayer that the power of the Holy Spirit was unleashed.

Now I know that this church has its prayer warriors and people who are involved in all sorts of prayer ministries. But we need to be even more involved in consistent, intentional corporate prayer. One thing that I learned again this week, and I always have to learn this, is that our tendency is to get to work, put out fires, set up plans. But God's mission and the future of this church requires so much more than just our action. It requires God's intervention and that intervention comes through prayer.

For some prayer may seem like such an impractical task. Can't we do something more useful and practical? Jesus tells his disciples in Luke 18:1 about their need to pray always and not lose heart. It is in prayer that we find the courage to move forward without knowing what time it is. It is in prayer that we find the audacity not to worry when the world is falling around us because God is lifting us up on eagles' wings. It is in

prayer that we receive God's power in the Holy Spirit while those around us falter and lose sight of Christ.

This is exactly where the disciples were as they were looking into the sky at a disappearing Jesus. How in the world are we going to do anything without him. We are not. It is impossible to do anything without Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit that we receive from Christ. How can we be witnesses to the ends of the earth, don't make me laugh, maybe Strasburg, Lancaster County, even Pennsylvania, but the ends of the earth. I can't do that. They could have tried, their best efforts proved futile in their last question to Jesus.

So the disciples did the only thing they knew to do, and that was to obey Jesus. They went back to Jerusalem and waited, prayed, constantly, fervently, and then Acts 2 came along, and the power and the people. You know, some of us in our lives find yourselves in Acts 1, times of uncertainty, stumbling, bumbling, distracted. Those are times of prayer, Acts 2 is coming, don't give up, don't lose heart. Surround yourself with great people and pray and wait on Jesus.

So this year as a church, we are going to take our lead from the early disciples. We are going to pray. Every Tuesday morning at 7am I will set the example and gather to pray for the future of this church, for each one of you and for God's power to work through each of us. Wherever you are, pray together. We may even have periodic Sunday evening prayer sessions.

I'm looking forward to Acts 2, but we have to stop in Acts 1 and look for God's guidance. We are going to get zapped by the Holy Spirit to do greater things in the very near future, things we could never imagine. The sooner we pray together, the sooner it will come. Amen.