**May 24, 2020 Acts 1:6-14**

***What Are We Supposed To Do?***

**Scripture:** Acts 1:6-14 NRSV

*(6)So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7)He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. (8)But 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." (9)When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (10)While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. (11)They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (12)Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. (13)When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. (14)All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.*

**Notes:**

1. Why do we stand gazing at the heavens when the world is full of the ***lost*** ***people***?
   1. We hope for a sign that He is ***coming*** ***again***.
   2. To enter the Kingdom of God we must be ***born*** ***again***.
   3. ***Obey*** the Great Commission.
2. Are you doing what you have been ***commissioned*** to do?
   1. Make ***disciples***;
   2. ***Teach*** all the commandments from Christ.
   3. ***Baptize*** these new disciples.
3. Why did the disciples, not begin ***ministering***?
   1. They had not received the ***Holy*** ***Spirit*** yet.
   2. They devoted themselves to ***prayer***.
4. Are you living life according to the teachings of ***Jesus***?
   1. ***Devote*** yourself to prayer
   2. ***Devote*** your actions to live according the commandments of God and teachings of Jesus.
   3. ***Devote*** your life to making disciples for Christ;
   4. Get ***busy*** building the kingdom for God.

**Transcript:**

Hey everybody; have you seen that they have brought back the CBS Sunday Night Movie. I can remember watching some of the classics on Sunday nights in my younger years. Yes; and I happened to catch it the other week when they were showing the movie Forrest Gump. Shane always had a soft spot for the movie Forrest Gump, he would watch it over and over and, well, I can’t blame him. I watch it over and over too. I have to admit when I first saw it, I believed it was based on a true story and an actual person. But I soon figured out that it wasn’t.

You know one person cannot be involved personally in so many historical events. I realize now that the author was sticking his fictional character, Forrest, into the history of the United States. But there is one scene that confuses me. Forrest is left by the love of his life, Jenny. Lost and confused, contemplating the meaning of life; he just up and starts running. He runs to the east coast, then to the west, and back to the east again. He just ran and ran and ran. Then one day, as he is running in what appears to be Monument Valley, with a crowd of faithful followers behind him, he stops; he looks around; and says “*I’m pretty tired, I think I’ll go home now.*” As he begins walking through the crowd of his followers, one speaks up, “*Now what are we supposed to do?*”

This scene reminds me of the passage in Acts that we will look at today. Jesus is standing on a mountain top, what we know as the Mount of Olives. He gives some final instructions to his disciples; and then he ascends to heaven. And, I can hear the disciples thinking to themselves as Jesus leaves them; “*Now what are we supposed to do?*” I am reminded of this not so much because of what Jesus said or did not say; but more so because it makes me wonder, after all this time, did the disciple’s really get it. Turn with me to Acts 1:6-14 and share with me in the reading of our sermon passage.

***(6)So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7)He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. (8)But 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." (9)When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (10)While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. (11)They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (12)Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. (13)When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. (14)All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers. Acts 1:6-14 NRSV***

Let’s begin taking a look at what has been happening in the story of God; specifically the New Testament. Jesus came into the world as an infant. Out of fear for the child’s life, after being warned by one of God’s angels, the family heads to Egypt and where Jesus grew and learned. After Herod dies and the threat is over, Jesus’ family heads back to Nazareth. Jesus continues to grow and learn. On one pilgrimage with his family, he is left behind and it is discovered a couple days later. Life happens quickly and the next we hear from Jesus is at about the age of 30, when he enters the water of the Jordan River to be baptized by his cousin John. Jesus begins His earthly ministry and calls his twelve disciples, but many other disciples follow as well. Some follow because it is the popular thing to do. “*Hey everybody else is doing it*.” But they do not get into the words of Jesus as deeply as the twelve. After nearly three years of ministry; sharing God’s word to the people, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, supplying the needs of the helpless, and giving hope to the hopeless. In an attempt to end the ministry, the leadership of the day crucified Jesus. But Jesus, being God in flesh and blood, rises from the grave victorious over death and sin; bringing the opportunity for all of humanity to be forgiven of our sin. After Christ’s resurrection he spends time clearing up some of the disciples confusion.

I like the words of John 21:25 where the apostle states, “***But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.***” There is so much that could be told; but we do not have the time this morning. However, we come to our passage today in Acts where we see the only detailed version of the Ascension of Christ in scripture.

Jesus shares the great commission with his followers, “(***19)Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20)and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV***”

And somewhere in the discussion surrounding this commission, they ask, “***Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?***” We people can become fixated on the knowing the future, what is going to happen; and even more prevalent, when it will happen. A popular question we hear from time to time is, “*When will I die, and how will it happen?*” Some want to know, while others want it to remain a mystery. But when it comes to Jesus’s return, many want to know; and there are many who are willing to show their intelligence and share when these events will take place. But there is one detail that they many times forget, “***(7)It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority***.”

Jesus said this more than once, and also stated that even he does not know the time or place of His return. Now the question I always come back with is this; “*If Jesus does not know the time and place, what makes anybody feel so arrogant that they think they that they are more informed than the Son of God and are able to predict the coming of Christ?*” We do not know because we are not meant to know. We do not know because time is getting short and there is much work to be done. We do not know because if we knew the time and place we would get lazy and wait til the last hours to get to the work of God. How do I know? Because we are very much the same and we are human. Human nature is to do as little as possible until it is absolutely necessary.

So Jesus commissions the disciples; by the way that is us, we are His disciples in this world today; and then Jesus ascends to heaven. And the disciples stand there gazing at the heavens where Jesus disappears from sight. Two Men in white robes ask them, “***Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?***” and they continue speaking, “***This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.***” When these men finished speaking, the disciples return to Jerusalem and enter into a locked room where they devoted themselves in prayer.

What does all of this mean? I have a couple of questions that come to mind that may help us figure this out.

First, why do we stand gazing at the heavens when the world is full of the lost people, lost people who are seeking the refuge, mercy, grace, forgiveness, and healing that is found in Christ. We stand gazing at the heavens in hope for a sign that He is coming again. Let me say that we do not need a sign, Jesus said he would return and I know that He will return someday to take his beloved church with him to share eternity in His father’s house; our fathers house. We do not need to know the exact hour when and where; we need to be busy doing the work we have been commissioned to do.

Question two; are you ready for that day? To be ready for that day, we must be living our lives in accordance with his teachings. Remember Jesus conversation with Nicodemus in John 3? In order for us to enter the Kingdom of God Jesus says in John 3:7 that we must be born again. Repent, turn away from your wicked ways, and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing flood; are you washed in the blood of the Lamb. What this lyric means is that if we want to spend eternity with Him in heaven we must ask his forgiveness, believe that he hears us and has forgiven us and then live according to his will, following the leading of the Spirit. Part of that leading includes obeying the Great Commission. Each of us is commissioned to do these things if we have received his forgiveness, then we are his disciples.

Have you been doing what you have been commissioned to do? “***(19)Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20)and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV***” We are called to make disciples; what are disciples? Disciples are people who follow your teachings.

What are we to teach? We are to teach all of the commandments and teachings we have received from Christ. We must be careful not to share our own opinions but the teachings of Jesus. Make sure what we share is biblically sound and in alignment with the scriptures.

We are called to baptize these disciples. Now I want to take a moment here to say this; If you claim to be a disciple of Christ and you have not been baptized; you have unfinished business. Baptism is the outward sign of inward grace; a demonstration for the body of Christ of what the Lord has done for you in your heart. If you want too be baptized, we need to talk; I was planning a baptism service for Pentecost Sunday; next week. Unfortunately we will still be practicing our social distancing but as soon as we are able to meet together in our sanctuary, we will have a baptism service. And, I invite any of you who wish to be Jesus’ disciple and are not baptized, to be baptized on that day.

There is one more question I have to ask before closing today. Why did the disciples, present at the ascension, not begin ministering to the lost in their region? I do not have an answer to that question. But there is one possible reason. They had not received the power of the Holy Spirit yet. Yes Jesus breathed on them when he entered their room after his resurrection and said “receive the Spirit.” But they would not receive the full power of the Holy Spirit until Pentecost Sunday. Which we will celebrate next Sunday. These disciples did not experience the Holy Spirit in the same way that we have; they had to wait for Him to arrive. So they returned to Jerusalem and waited in the upper room, devoting themselves to prayer. Have you devoted yourself to prayer? How is your prayer time, do you have a prayer time, and during that time what do you pray for? Do you take time to listen for His voice to speak to you? If not how will you know what the Lord is calling you to do. We must take time to listen, this is as much a part of prayer as lifting up our requests, maybe even more so.

So I come back to Forrest Gump ending his long run and going home; and, to the one disciple who asking the question, “*Now what are we supposed to do?*” Then I come back to the disciples staring into the heavens where Jesus is slowly disappearing. Can you hear them wondering, “*What are we supposed to do?*” As disciples of Jesus, he has made it crystal clear what we are supposed to do. Receive the Holy Spirit, make disciples, baptize the disciples and wait for Christ’s return.

So take some time to assess your relationship with the Lord? Are you living your life according to the teachings of Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus has forgiven your sins? Have you experienced the Holy Spirit leading you and guiding you?

Are you obeying the commandments? Love the lord with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Are you loving one another as Jesus loved us? Remember Jesus said there is no greater love than for one to lay down his life for another? Do you love that much?

Are you making new disciples? Have you been sharing with others, what Jesus has done for the world? Have you been sharing with others what Jesus has done specifically for you? Have you been sharing with others what they need to do in order to be forgiven? And, have you been sharing with others how to continue growing in wisdom and knowledge of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ?

Today I am leaving you with a few challenges. If you are listening to these questions and answering no to any of them? Devote yourself to prayer for your own spiritual growth. Devote your actions to living in accordance with the commandments of God and teachings of Jesus. And finally, devote your life to making disciples of Christ; wherever you are, He is with you, guiding and encouraging you; to speak the truth of His kingdom to those you encounter in this world. Stop staring into the heavens, waiting for His return, and get busy building the kingdom.