

WAYPOINTS
MONDAY, 1/20

Read Acts 1:1-3.

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach² 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.

The book of Acts was written by Luke, the gospel writer. For Luke, the book of Acts is an extension of his gospel. In his gospel, Luke reveals the life and teachings of Jesus. The book of Acts continues the story through the early church.

Much like Luke's gospel, the book of Acts begins with a brief introduction to a man named Theophilus. Luke was a disciple of the Apostle Paul and it is likely that Theophilus was one of Luke's disciples. Luke wanted to pen an account of Jesus' ministry both in His life and through the church to benefit Theophilus and other Christians.

There is a central theme that runs throughout the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Clinton Arnold says the theme is this: God's great plan of salvation has come to fulfillment in the life, death, and ascension of Jesus the Messiah, and continues to unfold as the Spirit-filled church takes the message of salvation from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Luke's gospel recounts Jesus' ministry, while Acts reveals how Jesus' ministry continues through His new body, the church.

This is why the book of Acts is so important for us today. It reminds us that Christ has passed the torch to us, so to speak. We have inherited the ministry that He began so long ago. We know that we do not do this work alone. Jesus is sitting at the right hand of His Father, directing and empowering the mission through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is something we need to confront from time to time. Sometimes we can act like Jesus' ministry stopped when He ascended to be with His Father--like we're in some kind of holding pattern until He chooses to come back. This is simply not the case. Jesus' mission continues still today. He is calling the church to represent Him as we carry on His ministry. I wonder how you are connected to Jesus' mission.

Praying Together:

"Risen and Glorious Lord, we celebrate that You are indeed alive and continuing the work that You began. May You work through me in such a way to bring You glory. Amen."

WAYPOINTS
TUESDAY, 1/21

Read Acts Acts 1:4-5.

⁴On 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. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Jesus shares with His followers about the new era of God's reign. It is an exciting time for them because they now know that Christ will begin to take back God's world ransacked by sin. Resurrection was now possible for all creation.

I can only imagine the excitement Jesus' followers felt as they heard Him reveal this news. These were folks who had watched Jesus minister to others. They had practiced it themselves. Now, the time was ripe for them to go out and share this news with the world. I bet they could hardly contain themselves. However, Jesus asks them to do just that. He tells them to wait.

Now why would Jesus want His followers to wait before striking out on this new mission? This is interesting in that Jesus is about to call them to participate in a massive, global undertaking. Why not have them get started as soon as possible? Jesus asked them to wait because even though they had been called to go out, they did not yet have the means. They had the calling, but not the capacity.

They had a God-sized mission, and living into a God-sized mission required God-sized help. God's help was to come in the form of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would give them the capacity to live out Jesus' calling. In just a few verses, Jesus will tell them that they will receive power through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will provide the power they need to continue the work Jesus began.

When I think about this, I am convicted by how often I try to approach God's work apart from God's power. It is easy for us to try to do God's work apart from His power. Of course, when we do so, we tend to find out just how difficult this work is, and, as a result, often end up frustrated.

If we are to truly own our call in Jesus' work, we must recognize that we do not have the capacity to do our part in Jesus' mission apart from the Holy Spirit. We do not work independently from the Spirit but in conjunction with the Spirit.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, You are the power we need to live into the call Jesus has given us. You accompany us in the work of the Kingdom. You provide us wisdom and power. You guide us and make provision for us. We invite You to speak and direct us in all our ways. Amen."

WAYPOINTS

WEDNESDAY, 1/22

Read Acts 1:6-8.

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But 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."

In Acts 1:6-7, Jesus' followers ask Him about when His Kingdom will come. They imagine that a part of this new phase of God's reign will involve Israel's being given political independence again. They ask when it will take place. Jesus doesn't budge. He says that it isn't for them to know "the times or periods the Father has set by His own authority."

Like Jesus' followers in Acts 1, we too have our own questions for Jesus concerning the events around the coming of His Kingdom. Truth be told, it is not our place to know every mystery of the Kingdom. Our place is to do the work of the Kingdom. We are to recognize the work God is doing here and now, and then join Him in His work.

Our call today is to participate in God's mission to restore this broken world. Every act of Christ-glorifying service points to His reign. Every wrong made right carries with it the possibility of restoration. I wonder what ways you are joining God's efforts to restore our world.

The truth is we aren't always going to know everything about the events surrounding the fulfillment of God's Kingdom, and frankly, we don't need to know everything. We are called to live by faith. That means trusting that God has that in hand while we are faithfully carrying out our responsibility in the meantime.

Jesus uses the term "witnesses" to describe our ministry. When you read through Luke, you begin to see what Jesus means by being a witness. He defines a witness as someone who tells others what they have seen, heard, or experienced. As those who have been blessed by Jesus, we have a story to tell an unbelieving world. We are to share what Jesus has done in our lives. We are witnesses to the peace, love, and hope that He has brought to us. We tell the story of when we turned to Him and He healed our marriage or ministered to a deep wound in our lives. We each have a story to tell about why we have chosen to put our hope in Jesus and what He has done in our lives.

So, what is your story? If someone were to ask you why you chose to follow Jesus, what would you say? How has Jesus blessed you?

Praying Together:

"God, You are great and have done great things in my life. Give me the courage to tell my story. Open my eyes to opportunities to be a witness to Your grace and mercy. Amen."

WAYPOINTS

THURSDAY, 1/23

Read Acts 1:9-11.

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."

After Christ made his mission clear, He ascended into heaven before His disciples' eyes. All they knew to do was watch him slip away as He drifted further and further into the clouds.

I have to imagine there was some sense of loss and perhaps fear as they watched their Lord journey back into the heavens above. Yes, they had a mission, but Christ had always been there ready to help them when needed. What were they going to do without Him?

As they watched him disappear into the clouds, two men in white appeared before them with a message. The angels' message is essentially this: Jesus will come back just as He went, but until then, you've got work to do, so stop staring at the sky.

This passage parallels a story from Luke's gospel. When Jesus was a child, He remained at the Temple after His parents had set out to return home. When they found Him days later, His reply to them was, "Didn't you know that I had to be about My Father's business?" Even at a younger age, Jesus was focused on the task the Father had given Him. He wasn't going to miss out on His purpose.

Here is the parallel to today's passage. The angels are telling the disciples that it's time to be about Jesus' business, which was the Father's business; in other words, stop wasting time and get to it. That message is relevant to us today. It's time for us to be about our Father's business. In the same way that God created us to partner with Him in ruling creation--He on His throne and our acting as an extension of His rule--so now Jesus is on His throne. We are to take up our call to do His Kingdom work as an extension of His ministry. We must be about the Father's business just as Jesus was. We must be active as witnesses to Jesus and His ministry in our lives. We will want to be about the work of growing in Him so that we might have something to impart to another disciple.

The good news is that we do not do this work alone. Jesus' charge to go is accompanied with the promise that He will be with us. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus closes His call with these words: "And lo I am with you always to the very end of the age." Until He returns again when He will finish the work He began once and for all, He will be at work among us as we take up the Father's business.

Praying Together:

"Father, we are never alone. This is especially true when we are laboring alongside You in Your work. May this promise give us confidence as we continue to grow in Your service. Amen."

WAYPOINTS
FRIDAY, 1/24

Read Acts 1:12-14.

¹²Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. ¹³When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James, son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

After Jesus ascended to be with the Father, His followers go to Jerusalem just as Jesus had asked them to do. It was a smaller group made up of the 11 remaining disciples who walked with Jesus, the women who followed and supported their ministry, and Jesus' family.

Jerusalem will become their home base of sorts until they receive the "gift" Jesus told them about. Until then, they must wait for that gift to come.

Now, let's be honest: waiting is not our favorite thing. We might ask why Jesus didn't just give them the Holy Spirit when He ascended. I don't really know the answer to that question. We'll consider some possibilities when we get to the Pentecost story next week, but for whatever reason, for now, they must wait.

I want to highlight for us what their waiting looked like. Verse 14 gives us a glimpse into their waiting. It reads, "They all joined together constantly in prayer." They didn't just sit around twiddling their fingers or entertaining themselves. They kept their faces turned toward the Lord. They continued to seek Him; as a result, their hearts were ready whenever He was ready to give them the gift.

In the Bible, waiting is considered an act of hope. To wait was to anticipate God's doing something great. When we anticipate God's movement, we are exercising faith. Sometimes we pray and are uncertain if God is doing anything or even *if* He will do anything. We cast our prayer out there without much assurance it will make a difference, when we should be anticipating that when we pray, God is on the move, and that whether we see it or not--whether our prayer is answered right away or years later--God is active and working for good. This is faith at its best!

So, what are you currently praying about? Whom are you praying for? As you wait for those prayers to be answered, consider whether your prayers are being accompanied by a sense of anticipation. Are you expecting God to move in mighty ways?

I want to close by challenging us as a church to pray like Jesus' followers do here. I want us to be constantly praying for the Lord to move in our life together and through us. I want us to pray that God will draw people to us who will be opened up to new life through Jesus. Pray that we will be witnesses who go out with such a purpose. Pray that our ministries will move the needle

for the Kingdom. Let us anticipate that we will indeed see God continue to do greater and greater things in our midst.

Praying Together:

“Lord, we call on You to be at work in our life together as a church. We are grateful to be called to share in Your work. We serve with the expectation that You will move in power through us because You are pleased to do so. May we see lives and relationships transformed through Your mighty power. Amen.”

WAYPOINTS

SATURDAY, 1/25

Read Acts 1:15-20.

¹⁵*In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”*

¹⁸*(With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. ¹⁹Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)*

²⁰*“For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms:*

*“‘May his place be deserted;
let there be no one to dwell in it,’
and “‘May another take his place of leadership.’*

In the second half of Acts 1, the remaining disciples gather to choose one to take Judas' place. Before we get to the election of the new soon-to-be apostle, we learn of Judas' fate.

Verses 18-19 serve as a side note to what happened to Judas after he betrayed Jesus. Luke tells us that Judas bought a field, and in that field, he fell and burst open. Thank you, Luke, for that detail.

This differs from what Matthew tells us about Judas. In Matthew 27, Judas tries to return the “blood money” and then goes to hang himself. On the surface, it seems these two stories are conflicting accounts. It might not be the case.

Matthew doesn't tell us where Judas hanged himself. It could be that Judas hanged himself on his own land that Luke points out. If he had been hanging there for days before being cut down from the tree, his body might very well have burst open once it hit the ground. Sorry to add to the gruesome details, but it could be they emphasized different aspects of the same story.

Why does Luke tell us about Judas' fate? It serves both as information and a warning of sorts. Luke is telling us it's not a good idea to betray Jesus. While not everyone will burst open, so to speak, it doesn't turn out well.

One thing to note is that Judas' betrayal was no surprise. The scriptures foretold of one who would turn on Jesus. As Jesus so often does, He doesn't try to stop the betrayal but uses it for good, and, in this case, accomplishing the salvation of the world.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we thank You for loving us. We are grateful that You use even something as horrific as Judas' betrayal for the good of all. You are worthy to be praised. Amen."

WAYPOINTS
SUNDAY, 1/26

Read Acts 1:21-26.

²¹Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, ²²beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

²³So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." ²⁶Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

The apostles believed it was important to fill the missing slot in the Twelve. It could be that the number twelve was significant. Twelve was the number of tribes that comprised the nation of Israel. Israel was God's chosen people, meaning He chose to dwell in their midst. He would be their God so long as they were His people.

The risen Jesus has brought about the new creation. God's covenant has been extended to all who would hear His invitation to life and meet Him with faith. They would become a part of God's glorious reign and the newly created order of the Kingdom. So, it was important that the Twelve be restored as they were messengers of God's rule in much the same way the tribes were for Israel.

The criteria they use to determine the one to take Judas' place was that he had been with Jesus and the Twelve from the beginning. This is important for us to hear as we often think that only the Twelve disciples were with Jesus. That is true in some stories, but more often than not, Jesus was accompanied by more disciples than the Twelve. The Twelve were those specifically chosen by Jesus and given greater access to Him, but other people also chose to follow Jesus. They stayed near Jesus sometimes when He was in certain areas, perhaps closer to their homes.

In order to choose the next apostle, they cast lots. This is much like rolling dice. It seems like a strange way to make such an important decision, but it was common in their day. They believed that God would use the lots to make His will known. However, this is the last time in the Bible that the people use the casting of lots to make decisions about God's will. Why is that? What do they use instead? They look to the Holy Spirit for that. The Spirit becomes their wisdom and insight into God's will.

I wonder how often you look to the Holy Spirit to be your guide and for wisdom. How might we better employ prayer in our lives as we seek God's will?

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, lead me to knowing and understanding God's will for my life today. I trust You to show me the things Jesus is calling me to do. I am open and willing to do whatever You ask. Amen."