

Final Instructions
Acts 1:1-11
Sunday, May 24, 2020
Ascension Sunday

Over the past four weeks our worship has been inspired by the times when Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection. With each of these meetings, Jesus taught his disciples some important lessons.

We met Jesus on the road to Emmaus with Cleopas and his friend. Jesus taught them about the Old Testament passages that prophesied about his life, death, and resurrection.

We met Jesus in the upper room with the other disciples where Jesus challenged them to believe the unbelievable.

Then after a few days, we catch up with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where he reminds the disciples about key events and lessons they shared in their life together.

On that same day, we become aware of Peter's transformation and how much Jesus loves us too. We didn't see Jesus condemn or even criticize his disciples, but rather he forgave them and offered them salvation and this new chapter of their lives with him.

In our lesson today, Jesus appears to his disciples to give them final instructions as he leaves them.

What were those final instructions?

Jesus tells the disciples to wait in Jerusalem because God is going to give them a gift. They will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. When that gift from the Holy Spirit comes, they will be empowered in such a way that they will be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, then into Judea and Samaria, and eventually to the ends of the earth.

But the disciples must wait for the Holy Spirit's power. This raises an interesting question. Is there a difference between the Holy Spirit and this Holy Spirit power that Jesus is talking about?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One way to think about The Holy Spirit is being the power of God. This power manifests itself in an unbelievable number of ways. Consider:

- It was the Holy Spirit who formed the earth and the heavens
- gives life to every living thing; plant, animal, bird, sea creature, and human beings
- can prompt the most unique inspirations into people's minds and hearts like Michaelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel; Handel's Messiah; someone donating to our building fund; to your neighbor calling to check on you

--The Holy Spirit parted the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan River; stopped the storm that was rocking the disciples' boat; and empowered Jesus and Peter to walk on water.
--The Holy Spirit is why we can say that God is omnipresent and omniscient.

The disciples had been working with the Holy Spirit when Jesus sent them out to heal and teach two by two. But now, Jesus wants them to wait for a new manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power.

What is this Holy Spirit power? When we hear the word power we often associate it with physical power right? But the Holy Spirit's power is not just physical power that will help them withstand persecution and imprisonment, and hardships like shipwrecks. It is also a power that will give them the lessons they need to preach and teach to the crowds and to individual persons they encounter. This power will give them the ability to love each and every person and crowd they meet. This power will give them the ability to heal and cast out demons. There is no power like Holy Spirit power. Jesus told them to wait for this power. This is the power that Christ had with him when he lived upon the earth. This is the gift from God they were waiting for.

When we wait for something, we can have different emotional responses to it depending on what the thing is right?

If you are waiting for graduation so you can start a new chapter of your life, there is some excitement but also some fear. This chapter of life is a mystery to some degree, and you aren't sure what it holds.

If you are waiting for test results from your doctor, you are bound to be a bit worried at the least, or terribly anxious, or anything in between on that spectrum.

If you are waiting for a vacation, you are probably excited as you wait.

If you are waiting to find out if you can keep your job, you may be dreading the next meeting with your boss.

If you are waiting for your folks to find out you flunked a class and wondering how they are going to punish you, you are probably dreading that too.

Waiting is hard. Waiting on the Lord is even harder. But this is what Jesus wants the disciples to do. Wait. On. God.

Waiting on God is not a new thing for the faithful. Consider these times when our devoted ancestors waited on God:

Noah built an ark and waited for the Flood to happen

Enslaved Hebrews waited for a deliverer to lead them back into the Promised Land

The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel waited to return from their exiles in Babylonia and Assyria.

The Jews waited for their Messiah, the new Davidic leader that would restore Israel
The Jew waited 30 years for Jesus to be anointed by the Holy Spirit to begin his ministry.

I wonder if Peter got impatient and thought about venturing out without the Holy Spirit? Maybe it wasn't Peter who got impatient. Maybe it was Matthew or Thomas?

This is a very important lesson for the disciples and us to learn. What are we waiting on God for these days?

To reveal to someone a vaccine, or curing treatments for the coronavirus?

To reveal to someone else a vaccine or cure for any number of diseases that plague us today?

To end the fighting in the Middle East?

To end the fighting in our federal government?

Is there something more personal that you are waiting on God for?

A better job opportunity

Your future spouse

A baby

To go home to heaven

Is there anything we all could be waiting for? What about Christ's return? What about a spiritual awakening? For new families, couples, or singles to join our congregation?

Waiting on God rather than jumping ahead is for our best interests. Of course, we need to have a solid relationship with God in order to wait and then know when to go, what to do.

One thing I learned about "waiting for God" is it's not a "be still" kind of waiting. We are to continue living the life God has blessed us with right now. Be faithful to the Lord with our current responsibilities, but also keep our spirits alert and seeking God's will.

It is in this spirit that we will be celebrating sanctuary worship next week. We are still waiting on the Lord to bring a vaccine, a curing treatment. We are a coronavirus free county. Coming together to worship while waiting on the Lord to provide a vaccine or curing treatment is living by faith. Waiting and worshipping for Christ's return. Waiting and worshipping for an awakening. Waiting and worshipping for our congregation to grow.

Getting ahead of God is not good either. When we don't wait on God, we are thumbing our noses at God and doing our own self-centered plan. We are more apt to get tangled up into something that will be harmful to us or give us a bunch of problems. People often jump

into bad relationships, make terrible financial decisions, or take a weak opportunity because they didn't wait on the Lord or bother to seek his guidance.

This is why waiting on the Lord is so important. By waiting on the Holy Spirit, the disciples were given the opportunity to hone their relationships with one another. They had the opportunity to nurture their relationship with God the Father through the Holy Spirit.

Next week, we'll celebrate the birth of the church, Pentecost. And we'll be able to celebrate this because the disciples did wait on the Holy Spirit and boy did the Spirit deliver!

But for today, the disciples had their last meeting with the resurrected Christ on earth. They watched him ascend into the heavens. We celebrate Christ's ascension because he went home to be with his Father in the heavenly realms. Jesus came and dwelled upon the earth, experiencing everything that every human being experiences. He came out of love. He came to serve, teach, heal, inspire, free people from oppression. He came to die, to become the eternal sacrifice for our sins, to open the way for all of us to enter the heavenly realms. But the time finally arrived when God called him home to take his rightful place on the throne at the right hand of God. Christ our Lord is King of kings, Lord of lords, and his reign will continue forever and ever. Christ's ascension demonstrates Christ's ultimate victory over death and all that is evil in this world.

Celebrating Christ's ascension reminds us that we can rise above the evil in this world by learning to wait on the Holy Spirit.

It is my prayer that this message sustains and nurtures your faith in our living God. Amen.