

“What are you waiting for?”  
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Acts 1:1-11 Luke 24:49-53  
Sunday, May 25, 2009

A man climbs to the top of Mount Sinai to talk to God. Looking up, he asks the Lord. "God, what does a million years mean to you?" God replies, "A minute." The man asks, "And what does a million dollars mean to you?" God replies, "A penny." The man asks, "Can I have a penny?" The Lord replies, "In a minute."

So, God loves and God offers grace, but I think that God also has a sense of humor. It is difficult for me to read today's exchange in Acts and not get a chuckle out of it. No doubt it is a powerful and mysterious moment. No doubt many of us overlook this moment as a part of our faith story, not allowing it to affect or shape our faith. Yet, knowing what we know about the disciples (their backgrounds, their interactions with Jesus and one another), the image of the men looking up to the sky is a humorous one.

There's an old Charlie Chaplin silent comedy that starts with him standing on the street corner, head cocked up at an odd angle, trying to rub out a crick in his neck. A passerby stops, cranes his neck upward to see what's so interesting up there. Then another and another, until finally it takes on a life of its own. A whole crowd has gathered, looking and pointing and waving their arms. Chaplain, meanwhile, finally finishes working out the kink, looks around and sees all these crazy people looking up at nothing, just because they thought *he* was. After tapping a few of them on the shoulder and getting pushed away, he puts his hat back on, swings his cane, and saunters on up the block, leaving the crowd on the corner still staring at the sky. The men of Galilee are much like the crowd in the silent picture...oblivious to all around them. Who knows how long they stood there

looking absently up into the air before the “men in white” tapped them on the shoulder and said, “uh, men of Galilee, you gonna stand there all day?”

It’s important to understand being recognized as someone from Galilee was not necessarily a good thing. Remember in John, Nathaniel asks “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nazareth happens to be in Galilee. In Hebrew, it means “Circle of Heathens.” Ouch. No wonder Jesus hung out with them. They were not the kind of folks people were inviting to dinner parties.

This interesting bunch of Galileans are staring at the sky when the two “men in white” appear. They ask the disciples, “what are you waiting for?” One of the disciples might have said, with a little hesitance, “we are waiting for Jesus.” It might be like the little boy who came in from Bible Study and his grandmother asked him what they studied. His reply was "Nothing." His grandmother asked, "Didn't you study Jesus?" His reply was "No, he wasn't even there."

The disciples were looking for Jesus. Maybe they thought he was coming back in a few minutes. It was time for the disciples to move on, but in that stunning moment, they found themselves frozen in time.

They were caught up in the amazement of what happened. Throughout history, there has been a reluctance to treat these stories seriously. Here we have a seemingly ridiculous story. Jesus gets taken up into the clouds (picture every bad movie representation you’ve seen of this)...there’s a great light and you see the bottom of his sandals as he is taken up. Maybe the image is a little cheesy, but the event itself is something that is powerfully mysterious. Scholars and lay people alike ask, “Did it happen? Didn’t it happen?” What exactly occurred? Was it a dream or made up? What is its importance? Since 1900, there have been three separate attempts at trying to figure out the historical Jesus. They were attempts at

ruling out or explaining away the supernatural. There's such a desire to have an explanation for the mysterious that often the point is lost.

One minister wrote, *"It's not a preacher's job to get rid of the strangeness or the wildness or the unpredictability of the stories in the Bible. If a story is mysterious, then the church needs to practice being mystified, not jump as quickly as possible to some explanation that removes all the shadows as well as the light."*

It's a good thing to be mystified – to ride with the wildness of God's narrative. This story is so cool. Not necessarily because of the event, but because of the power and promise behind it. Just before Jesus left, he reminded the disciples yet again to not get caught up in something you cannot control because some things are mysteries revealed in God's time. Jesus focuses their attention away from his return or when Israel will be restored. He says, "Go to Jerusalem and wait on the power to come. When it does, don't just stand there. Get a move on to Jerusalem, Samaria, and the ends of the earth."

Human nature and misunderstanding get the best of us sometimes. The disciples were no exception. When Jesus was taken up, there had to be a moment of confusion for the disciples. The men in white brought them back to earth when they said, "Hey, there's more, remember?" The men in white were like the police who break up crowds after something dramatic has happened. "Okay, the show's over...get a move on please."

Easter season is winding down. The pageantry of the Easter worship experience is behind us for another year. The show is over, and we are moving into Pentecost and then ordinary time. Even though we are Easter people, the Easter *season* is coming to an end. This change invites us to move on, but not alone (and not without the miraculous in our midst). Instead, we move forward with the power of the Holy Spirit. The power that was behind the resurrection and the ascension.

Jesus said the disciples would receive power, and then they should share the message of the good news to the ends of the earth. The good news of the Gospel is forgiveness for our sins. The good news is relief to the poor. The good news is justice. The good news is mercy to those who are hurting. The good news is that God's way of life is at hand. The power that forgives us is the power that helps us to forgive, to do justice, and to show mercy. It is a motivating, challenging and encouraging power. One author writes, "*this amazing, hard to believe, far-out story, reminds us of the power of the Spirit and that the spirit is at work in the church.*"

The Spirit is indeed at work in the church. It is at work in *this* church, in this community, in your life and in my life. Every once in a while, though, we need a gentle reminder like the disciples received as they stood watching the sky. "What are you waiting for?" What is stopping us from being who God is calling us to be? What is stopping us from jumping into that ministry we have been considering? What is stopping us from starting that ministry that is on our hearts? What is stopping us from advocating for justice? What is stopping us from showing mercy? I do not know what God has planned, but it has the potential to be miraculous. Our God is an awesome God with the power to change our lives, our community, and the world. *What are we waiting for?* Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Amen.