

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
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ROCHEPORT BLUEGRASS SABBATH

The Scripture

Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 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."

The Message

None of Your Business

Nick Larson

This evening, I want to highlight a portion of this Scripture and the beginning of Acts that often I've overlooked, and perhaps you've overlooked it as well. It is a really funny way to read and hear from the Divine, but in many ways, it is a thread throughout a surprising amount of the biblical narrative. It shows up in Job, and the Psalms, and perhaps some of the other wisdom writings to the Hebrew text. Plus, Jesus himself references it several times including in this text.

What is this silly preacher referencing, you might ask yourself?

Perhaps it's better if I tell you later, I want to tell you a story first.

With all the tornado watches, warnings, and damage around our state, it got me thinking of my own tornado close calls. As I have helped pass along information for denominational disaster relief folks, I've been thinking a lot about our brothers and sisters at Community Christian Church in Jefferson City, whose building has been condemned. In fact, yesterday, on Friday, they had more than 80 volunteers, including at least a few from Broadway helping clean up the church grounds. They were expecting more today; I hope they got plenty!

My heart has been with our brothers and sisters at First Christian Church in Jeff City where they have opened their building and food pantry to any and all who could use food. In the first day they opened after the storm, the pantry served 115 families. I've been praying daily for Rev. Bethany, Rev. Beau, Rev. Sarah, and each and every person connected to these congregations. At the community prayer service of Jeff City faith communities, Rev. Bethany shared just how much she has felt the Holy Spirit with them. Hearing her words made me think so much about this early church preparing for the first emergence of the Holy Spirit.

So, my thoughts, like perhaps yours, this week have largely been on two types of wind, the blowing of the Holy Spirit and the whipping winds of tornados.

When I was a teenager, a tornado struck my hometown in Northwest Indiana. The tornado, in April of 1994, tore a seven-mile swatch of destruction across Tippecanoe County in just seven minutes. The storm claimed three lives and injured more than 100 people. The tornado opened gas lines and exploded transformers. In the aftermath, this only added to the danger of the already volatile situation.

That tornado, like the one that struck Jeff City, reached 160 mph winds, and took away full homes, overturned trailer parks, and took out a brand new venetian blind factory. I remember seeing the devastation after the tornado had ripped whole utility poles clean out of the ground. It was the first time I had seen devastation and destruction like that up close and in person.

I remember that it demolished the Morris Bryant Swedish Restaurant that I used to get excited about going to for brunch. I used to wait in the line to go to the chef operating the Belgium waffle station, and then carrying back to the table my huge piping hot waffle covered in strawberries and whip cream. In thinking back to what year this might have been, I discovered that, in fact, the restaurant burned down just before the tornado which demolished the remains.

Memories can be a fickle thing, sometimes.

I remember that during that tornado, which also struck at night, there was a young child, who was killed. Three people lost their lives that night. But specifically, I remember that there was a family with two children, who I believe were in elementary school at the time, that were sleeping on opposite sides of the same wall. You know their bedrooms were side by side, and the shared wall between them had both headboards on it. Meaning these young children slept in separate rooms yet their heads were probably no more than two feet apart. And when the tornado came on so quickly, they didn't get to the basement in time.

This tornado roared through our town. I remember its sound, as we huddled in the basement bathroom, the tornado sounded like a train was in our backyard and it was still miles from our house. When that train railed through our college town, I remember learning that the tornado claimed the lives of one of those two sleeping siblings.

Can you imagine how tragic that would be? How horrifying it would be to lose a child or a sibling in a natural disaster like that, when you, yourself, survive lying only a few feet from them? I imagine that it would leave you with the aching question for the rest of your life, why? Why was their life taken, while mine was restored?

It reminds me of the question quoted by the gospel writer Luke (the author of his sequel in the book of Acts). It reminds me how Jesus likely had to answer this disciples' question almost as much as my kids do on long car trips.

Are we there yet? Is it time yet? When, Jesus?

Jesus' answer to the disciple's moments before he ascends and was lifted up (before he was risen into the coming kingdom of God - Moltmann) is essentially, *None of your business.*

He says, "It is not for you to know the times and periods that God has set by God's authority." It's the ending of the book of Job, when God, in a whirl of winds says, "where were you Job when I created the heavens and the earth?"

Yet, if we get hung up here at this question, we miss Luke's point. It isn't as much about where Christ ascends too or when God is going to act in the world, but the point of this text is that God **will** act in the world, **through the blowing winds of the Holy Spirit!**

Luke moves us here from the Creator of the Universe detailed in the Hebrew narratives, to his first volume which focused on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to now this volume's focal point which will be the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is both good news and bad news.

The bad news is that Jesus is no longer among us bodily on earth. He is returning to the source, where he shall go to judge the quick and the dead, which is a fancy way of saying he goes to prepare a place to welcome God's children.

The good news is that God is still with us in Spirit and in truth, even as we look to the next Sunday when we'll celebrate Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit to the early church, the continuation of God's presence, comfort and power among us.

The answer Jesus presents his disciples and us here might seem like bad news, but I think, in fact, it is not. I'm sure it was hard for those first disciples to realize that after 40 days with the resurrected Christ, he still wasn't going to march an army to Jerusalem to conquer it. It was going to be hard to lose their miracle working, healing, teaching, saving friend.

But the good news is that Jesus wasn't just leaving the kingdom of God stuff to a later date. In fact, the answer to their question about when the reign of God was coming, is, in fact, simple. Because at the root of their question, and most of ours when it comes to situations like those two siblings in that tornado of my childhood, is about power.

It's about who we believe has that power, and what's going to happen with it. This is where God does the very counter-cultural thing, then, and now. Jesus here is probing beneath the surface, because while he doesn't answer their question about exactly when God's reign will come, he does offer them the power to join in the coming reign of God. His answer to their "when" is sort of "now." The disciples then, and us tonight, have the power we need, in the Holy Spirit, to be witnesses to the reign of God being enacted all around us.

Real Power was enacted by Rev. Bethany Imbler in Jeff City, when at 1 a.m., she entered their destroyed church to grab a few items to help remind her congregation that the church is not a building, but its people. Power came in the leadership and volunteers who opened FCCJC's food pantry and handed out food to the 115 families, who needed it. It's in the Jeff City man, who through social media, raised thousands of dollars for everyday needs like cell phone chargers and bottled water. It was in the early disciples, who were going to emerge from Jerusalem and head to Galilee where they will speak in tongues witnessing to the saving acts of Jesus Christ to people in different languages.

Jesus is making a clear statement here, that true power, comes not through the crashing winds of the tornados, or the rising flood waters, or the evil acts of gunmen, who open fire in public places. No, true power, real power, comes in with a posture of

humility. It comes not from our need to answer the “whys?” or “whens?” of our lives...but to answer in the “hows!”

We, friends, church, are the answer to the HOW God chooses you.

God says this is not the kingdom of *survival*, where we are desperate for the petition of young families to join our aging congregations. God says this is not the kingdom of *activity*, where there are endless opportunities to be entertained in church. I know that it is not the kingdom of *consumption*, constantly striving for more, bigger, better.

When we ask Jesus when God will restore the kingdom to the good old days – to the way we think church ought to be, or the way that best satisfies us – Jesus points us not to a future kingdom or reign of God. Jesus points us to the Holy Spirit in the present moment.

In this, we are moved from passively waiting for Jesus to come fix things in the end times to actively participating in the work of the Holy Spirit now. If we sit staring like the disciples toward the heavens looking for Jesus, we might miss where the Holy Spirit blows next, helping us to witness about God’s love even in the midst of loss, or devastation, or destruction.

The Spirit is in you, friends, and you can make all the difference in the world, by showing up for all God’s children in need. So, when you find yourself asking the wrong question, or looking up in the wrong direction, listen instead for the voices of those who like those two shining white folks who appear, and hear their words, “Why are you standing here...?” That should remind you to get to work. Sharing and witnessing the work of the Spirit that is all around you, even in the wreckage left by tornados.

Amen.