

Feast of the Ascension - B

How St. Luke begins his second volume of writings brings out two basic facts:

First, Luke felt that he had said everything essential about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in what we normally call his Gospel.

Second, we can anticipate that his second work will tell us everything he thinks is essential to understand the beginnings and direction of the Christian movement after Jesus' ascension.

Something I never noticed before in these opening verses is that Luke states that, in the Gospel, he had dealt with all that Jesus *began to do and teach*. This seems to indicate that Luke sees everything that happened through the earthly Jesus as only the beginning of the Gospel ministry. The rest is being handed over to future disciples.

That makes it all the more significant that the disciples still seem relatively clueless, even as the risen Lord was appearing to them.

Even though he had opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and spoken to them about the kingdom of God, their final question to him asked if they were about to see the restoration of Israel.

They are still inclined to look backward to some sort of "Golden Age" rather than to embrace the radically new reality that is the resurrection from the dead.

The hopes and dreams that had carried with them from the very beginning had a hard time giving way to the

Feast of the Ascension - B

even greater thing that God was doing.

In spite of the fact that Jesus had explained more than once that God's future was not predictable in any way that they could understand, they still had a deep-seated tendency to try to make sense of it by fitting it into the categories and experiences they already knew.

Maybe that's why Jesus told them to wait. They were not ready to carry on his work yet. They needed God's gift of the Spirit who would teach them all they would need to know to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The fact that they were told to wait meant that they had to consider the fact that even having accompanied Jesus and having witnessed his resurrection did not provide them with all they needed to know.

They had to be patient until something more happened, something that was entirely beyond their control. What ever they thought made them ready to be witnesses, they still lacked power that Jesus was promising they would receive. That power would change the whole equation.

At this point, the disciples must have been as confused as Jesus wanted them to be before they could receive power to take on their vocation. Confusion does have the effect of making us stop and wait for clarification.

And just as the disciples were looking at Jesus intently, waiting for him to clear things up, he disappeared.

Feast of the Ascension - B

He really meant what he said, apparently. Their only job at this point was to wait. Until power came to them from on high, they could only go where they were sent and ponder while they waited for the fulfillment of his promise.

Of course, next Sunday we celebrate the moment when the Holy Spirit descends upon Mary and the disciples and they are empowered for the mission of proclaiming the Good News to every creature.

Perhaps our best option for today, if we want to spend time at each station along the way that the liturgy sets out for us, is to take some time pondering the presence of God in our own lives, and to what extent we are open to what he is sending our way.

Have our preconceived notions of what salvation should look like—the restoration of a past golden age, of things the way they used to be, for example—kept us from receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit?

Do we choose the comfort of our tradition when living out our faith rather than being willing to let God move us into new experiences, new encounters?

Do we think we have it down—the message of the Gospel—and so are willing to go out on our own without a second thought as to what God has in mind for us?

Ultimately, the Kingdom of God is God's to establish. We can do no better than to make ourselves available to the working of God's Spirit so that it can come about. Without that essential relationship we can find

Feast of the Ascension - B

ourselves working to no effect because the timing is off, the approach is faulty, or for a million other reasons.

Power from on high had been given to Jesus' disciples. It is offered to us, as well, but first we must let go and recognize that it is God's work first and foremost. We won't even fully understand it until we see it all come together when God will be all in all.

Feast of the Ascension - B

1. Luke's opening verses bring out two basic facts:
 - He had said everything essential about Jesus' life, death and resurrection in his Gospel
 - His second work will tell us everything he thinks is essential to understand the direction of the Christian movement after his ascension.

2. I never noticed: Luke says his Gospel dealt with all Jesus *began to do and teach*. It's only the beginning.

The rest is being handed over to future disciples.

3. All the more significant that the disciples still seem relatively clueless, even as the risen Lord was appearing to them.

Their final question to him: if they were about to see the restoration of Israel.

Still looking back to some "golden age" rather than embracing the radically new reality of resurrected life.

Their hopes and dreams they had begun with still won't give way to the even greater thing God was doing.

In spite of the fact that Jesus had explained more than once that God's future was not predictable, they still had a deep-seated tendency to want to make sense of it in reference to what they already knew.

4. That's why Jesus said "wait?" They needed God's gift of the Spirit who would teach them all they would need to know.

Feast of the Ascension - B

5. That they needed to wait means accompanying Jesus and witnessing the resurrection was not enough.

Can you imagine what would have happened if they had set out to preach without the Holy Spirit guiding and empowering them?

They had to be patient until something more happened—they had to receive power, to be empowered from on high. That would change the whole equation.

6. All this is met with confusion by the disciples. Confusion has the effect of making us stop and wait for clarification.

Just as the disciples look to Jesus for that, he disappears.

More talking with not help. He has to go so that the Holy Spirit may come. In the meantime, their one job is to wait.

7. Next Sunday we celebrate the moment when the Holy Spirit descends upon Mary and the disciples and they are empowered for their mission.

Perhaps our best option for today is to take some time to ponder the presence of God in our own lives, and the extent to which we are open to what he is sending our way.

- Have our preconceived notions of what salvation should look like kept us from receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit?

Feast of the Ascension - B

- Do we choose the comfort of our tradition rather than being willing to let God move us into new experiences, new encounters?
- Do we think we have it down—the message of the gospel—and so are willing to go out on our own without a second thought as to what God has in mind for us?

8. Ultimately, the Kingdom of God is God's to establish. We can do no better than to make ourselves available.

Without that we can find ourselves working to no effect because the timing is off, the approach is faulty, or for a million other reasons.

Power from on high had been given to Jesus' disciples. It is offered to us as well.

But first we must let go and recognize that it is God's work first and foremost.

We won't even fully understand it until God is all in all.