

Sunday, May 4th, 2008
Ascension Sunday

Acts 1:1-11, Luke 24:44-53
Going Up?

For so many people the goal of being a Christian is to follow Jesus up on that invisible elevator. The goal is for us to ascend to heaven to be with Jesus. And by us, I mean just that, you and me brother, you and me, sister. And, I think that is the yearning of the disciples in today's passages as well.

They stand there and gape, looking upwards as Jesus ascends into Heaven. They stand on top of the hill and are, I imagine, a bit disappointed when Jesus tells them they still have work to do here, and that they are not going up just yet. Yet all too often we assume that the life of faith is about our eternal destination and not about the lives of faith we live here and now.

But there those two gentlemen in white stand, and they ask the disciples why they are looking up into heaven. They want to ask them why wait here? Why not be out and about doing the work of the One that you are awaiting? And that is a great question for the church today.

Growing up, I remember revivals. I also remember the constant joking among Presbyterians about how many times some of those folks had gone to the front row, to the sinners' bench, and given their lives to Jesus Christ and nothing had changed about their daily lives. Dad, my unbaptized father, even got invitations to go to revivals at the black Baptist churches. But that is only going to work – if ever – if you can get the people to go to the revival to begin with.

So we can't exactly just stand there and stare up into space waiting for Jesus forever, can we? So what are we supposed to be doing up not just navel gazing. Well, Jesus tells the disciples, who turn into us to go back and wait for the Spirit. And we can wait for the Spirit. Which will result in pretty much what we're doing now. Waiting.

Or we could listen to what Jesus does before he ascends. Jesus teaches them all about himself, the Godhead, and opens the Scriptures to them. So they are supposed to start really understanding God, to understand the Scriptures and God's eternal purposes, both as expressed in Jesus Christ and as expressed in all Creation. So we should be studying, and praying, and spending time together, until such a time as the Spirit comes upon us (again, perhaps), and then preparing to go out and be witnesses.

Because we are witnesses. If politics has taught us nothing lately it is that we are witnesses. Ask Rev. Wright. Now, quite obviously from that example the kind of witness we have matters greatly. So what is our witness if we haven't studied Scripture and prayed to open ourselves to the mind of God? Is it more Rev. Wright? Or is it more Jesus Christ? Is it social justice or is it salvation centered? What aspects of Scripture does it highlight? And to be honest, isn't it quite a bit more than worrying about our eternal destination?

Sunday, May 4th, 2008
Ascension Sunday

Acts 1:1-11, Luke 24:44-53
Going Up?

If we understand the Gospel to be best revealed in the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then the only answer is that we go that others may have life, even at the cost of our own lives, following the example and pattern of the one who gives us life. So we have to go, and be witnesses to the ends of the earth, not just our own little niche. And we have to be witnesses who are willing for our lives not to go up but for God's love to go out. We must be willing to be the sent people of God who go not for our own salvation but for the salvation of the world...much as the one whose name we bear came.