

Is this the time?  
Acts 1:8-11  
Ascension Sunday

***Is this the time Lord Jesus when you will make all things right?***

I understand the disciples asking the question. After all they have experienced enough suffering in the world, including the execution of their leader, to yearn for the promised day when all shall be well on the earth. They assume that Jesus, now raised from the dead, will bring about the final reckoning, destroy all his enemies and make everything right. It's a dream they have had from the beginning and can never quite let go, even now at the moment of Jesus' Ascension.

Is this the time, Lord, when wars shall cease and the rivers of blood shall drive up; when the number of heroic dead remembered on Memorial days will decrease and not increase? Is this the time Lord when our proclivity toward violence, that is poisoning our culture will cease? **Is this the time, Lord?**

I experience this question as a prayer. In fact most of my questions about God's ways, of which there are many, are prayers. At least I want them to be prayers in the form of yearning for God's presence in the midst of many questions. I read the newspaper with the heartbreaking stories of refugees fleeing wars, victims of violence in our own land, or bizarre sordid relationships, along with news of some celebrity sadly and predictably falling from grace. The tweets never end and we shake our head together: **how long Lord, how long?**

Surely, anyone alive senses this tension of living in the world and hoping for a better day – when all shall be well. We know the tension. The spiritual question is whether hope will be abandoned in favor of apathy or some distraction that will reduce it. **I think living by faith means living right here - at the center of the tension, neither closing our eyes to the pain of this world nor closing our hearts to the deep hope for God's promised redemption.** The cost of faith is demanding, for sure, but the alternative is cynicism and despair.

I understand why people may look upon the doctrine of the Ascension as another example of the irrelevance of the Church. What do ascending bodies have to do with anything? Don't we have more pressing matters than to waste

time puzzling over something like the Ascension? I understand all that and agree with most of it.

But what if the question is less about the *literal* mechanics of Jesus' ascension and more about experiencing the absence of God as *the presence* of God?

**The most unsettling moments of my life are when the sense of God's absence is the only presence I know. I'm coming to learn that living by faith is precisely living with the sense of God's absence as much as if not more than God's presence.**

The disciples on the edge of Jesus' departure are like children playing on the living room floor who suddenly notice that their parents are putting their coats on. They have three questions:

**Where are you going?**

**Can you we go with you?**

**Who is staying with us?**

The disciples are asking the Lord the most pressing question of all – are you going to leave us alone in this world? Knowing the brokenness of this world and my own complicity in it, sometimes I feel like a motherless child: God have you gone for good and left us all alone? These moments linger and haunt me.

***Yet, what I am coming to know is that my questions about Jesus' absence are what compel me to a more authentic faith in the God who promises never to abandon us nor leave us as orphans in this world. And is always present even when absent.***

Jesus tells the disciples to watch and wait. Wait!?! Really?

There is nothing too satisfying about waiting. Most of us don't do it well. But that's a truthful answer; no varnish, all honest.

No one can know when God's dream of one humanity, living in a new creation will arrive, where there will be no more crying and every tear is washed away from every face. ***Until that promise comes, we wait expectantly but not passively. We wait actively***, engaged in works of mercy and compassion, with our lives open to the Spirit who makes all things new.

Remember the third question of the children on the living room floor: who is going to stay with us? Jesus says the Spirit will be poured out on us.

I think that means at least this: believers need not gaze into the skies looking for some cataclysmic return but rather live right now in this world in the power of his Spirit who has been given to us.

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This is the Good News: The followers of Jesus live by the Spirit of Jesus, in the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is the way of hospitality toward strangers, fearless love for enemies and forgiveness to those who have harmed us. It's proclaiming with our very lives Good News to all people.

We live by faith that the Spirit is present among us. No one knows the day or the hour when all shall be well. Until then, we live in hope for God's future and wait daily upon the Spirit who guides in the way of Jesus.

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In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.