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Luke 24.36-53

Acts 1.1-12

When Katy and I got engaged on Christmas day, it started out so well. I had just driven down to Jersey late on Christmas Eve, after keeping the ring in my jacket pocket all through the Christmas Eve service, so I would be sure I did not forget it. The next morning we exchanged Christmas gifts, and when there were no more gifts left, I asked her to marry me. She said yes, with only the slightest moment of hesitation. Then we called her parents to tell them the good news, and they were not exactly filled with excitement. They asked about the weather. But no matter, we were off to see my family and surely they would have a more appropriate reaction. Along the way, Katy and I decided to stop off at a Wawa, because you never know exactly when my family will eat dinner.

Once we got back in the car, ready to continue towards Pennsylvania, we discovered that my car would not start. The alternator went. So I called my Dad, who immediately flew out the door, and Katy and I settled in for 45 minute wait. Eventually we saw my Dad come to the stop light near the Wawa, and then we saw him drive away. Apparently he thought that I had said Walmart, and apparently in his rush to come rescue us, he left his phone at home. Katy and I continued to wait, until he eventually figured out his mistake. We waited in the parking lot for a while, jumping my battery, hoping it would have enough juice to make it home. Almost. It made it within four miles of parent's house, but by then it needed more than just a jump. So, hours later, my Dad just drove us the rest of the way, leaving my car on the side of the road. All of the

waiting, waiting for the reaction we expected, waiting to be rescued, waiting for Christmas dinner, made the day less than what we were expecting from an engagement.

This past Monday was the four month anniversary of my engagement, and since the day of the actual engagement was far from ideal, Katy decided to come up so we could have a picnic to celebrate the anniversary. Aside from being a bit chilly, it was a nice day, especially because there was no waiting. Katy brought up Amy, her little corgi that she got back in January. Since my hamster is not always the best company, Katy thought it would be nice for me to have Amy for a few days. So when Katy left to go back to New Jersey, Amy stayed behind. With dogs, there is always the person they bond with, their alpha, the one who trains them, the one whom they are most loyal to, for Amy, that person is Katy. So when Katy left, Amy spent a long time just sitting, staring at the door, waiting for Katy to come back. Eventually she gave me a look as if to ask, did she really mean to leave us in charge? Surely, she did not mean to leave the two of us in charge, we could really get into a lot of trouble. She is certainly smarter than that.

And this is my hermeneutical lens for interpreting the first chapter of Acts, surely He did not mean to leave us in charge, we could really get into a lot of trouble during all of this waiting. Surely He did not mean to leave us in charge, we who are constantly in strife, we who can never seem to agree on much of anything, we who so rarely are a faithful witness to the love and grace that has been poured out into our lives. We who live within the Church, which has too often been a voice of hatred, a voice of racism and violence, a voice of oppression and injustice. As we gaze upon the ascension with the disciples, we ask ourselves with the disciples, surely He did not mean to leave us in charge, because as we continue to wait, we could get into a lot of trouble. So as we continue to wait this morning, as we gaze into Heaven, let us wonder again, did He really mean to leave us in charge.

Some of you may not have paid enough attention in Sunday school to learn that the Gospel of Luke and Acts were both written by the same author. In Acts, we find the second volume, the second chapter of Luke's story, bridged by the ascension of Christ. We find a continuation to a story that seemed to have ended with the disciples continually praising God in the temple, waiting to be clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit, which Christ sends to them, which in turn sends them out into the world. We find the story of their waiting, of our waiting. We find a story that continues on past twenty-eight chapters, as we continue to live after the ascension, as we continue to proclaim the redeeming work of the cross. As we continue to wait. We find a story that that is addressed to each of us, to all who look up and wonder, did He really mean to leave us in charge.

In both his Gospel and Acts, Luke addresses his works to Theophilus, which translates to lover of God. While this could certainly be a person, an individual that Luke wanted to share these two volumes with, or a wealthy individual who could pay the cost of disseminating this text to the general public. I believe it is more likely that Luke is addressing the Early Church, a community of believers, as the lover of God. Luke is dedicating these two volumes to those who have been brought into community by God's grace. Those who have been called and sent by the Holy Spirit. Those who are outside the historical events recorded in Acts, but part of the Theophilus, the original, small, community of believers. To those who believe that the Gospel of Luke and Acts hinges on the resurrection of Christ, who sends us the Holy Spirit, which gives us the power to go into the world to share the Good News.

After the initial address Luke explains that Jesus stayed with the disciples for forty days, speaking about the Kingdom of God, ordering them to wait in Jerusalem, to wait for the Holy Spirit, which will send them out. After these forty days, Jesus led the disciples out of Jerusalem

to Bethany. Now, the last time they were in Bethany, Jesus was riding into Jerusalem, proclaimed as king, and they were hoping that Jesus was going to ride into town and take charge. They were hoping to escape the kingdom they knew. They were hoping that kingdom they knew would be destroyed, immediately to be replaced by the Kingdom Jesus had spoken about so often. The Kingdom, which filled the hopeless with hope, the Kingdom which belongs to the poor, which satisfies the hungry, which makes those who weep, laugh. That did not work out as they had expected, Palm Sunday was not the triumph they had expected. Now that they are again in Bethany, expecting this to be a redo, they ask Jesus “is this the time that You will restore the Kingdom of Israel?”. Is this finally the time of the Kingdom? Is our waiting over? Jesus simply tells them it is not for them to know, they just have to wait. Promising them that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, and we will be witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Precisely in His final moments with the disciples before His ascension, when the disciples ask if now is the time when You, will unfold the Kingdom, Jesus tells them it is not for them to know, it is for them to wait. When they ask Jesus what He will do, Jesus responds by telling them what they will do, they will wait, and there is work to do while we continue to wait, we will be witnesses even unto the ends of the earth. Immediately Jesus was lifted up, taken out of their sight and the disciples waited, gazing as He ascended. The disciples eventually waited so long that two angels had to appear to ask them what they were doing, and they said to them, “why do you stand looking up towards Heaven”, He will come back, just as He left. The angels never said it would take at least two thousand years of waiting, and who knows how long. But in the meantime we will wait, and what we do as we wait, as people who have been sent to wait, to witness to the ends of the earth, makes all the difference. Churches and individuals have found

countless answers to the question how we wait faithfully, but the answer that lies at the heart of all those who truly understand the mission to wait is...

By the power of the Holy Spirit, you will be witnesses to the power of God's grace. Proclaiming that Jesus continues to reign, and be present in our lives, working through the Holy Spirit, leading us ordinary men and women to be sent apostles, all the way to the ends of the earth. Between the ascension and the return of Christ, you will give witness and testimony to who Christ is, and continues to be in your lives, even as you are the Church often in strife. The Good News in the text, is as we gaze up, as we exist as the Church in strife, we are not left in charge. When we gaze up and wonder surely He did not mean to leave us in charge, the answer is a resounding no. Our story is not the Acts of the Apostles, but the Acts of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Jesus continues to reign in our lives, Jesus continues to act in our world, and we merely witness to that fact. We go out, as people transformed by God's grace, who proclaim to the world the power of God's love for us, who announce that even as we wait for Jesus to return, we are never without Him.

The Good News is that we are not sent out to create the Kingdom of God, that it is not up to us, but we have been moved by the Holy Spirit which send us to give testimony. Which sends us on a mission to live in a broken world, to live in the brokenness, not to fix it, not to save it, not to transform it, but with a vision of God's healing, to wait with only a vision of a world transformed only by God's grace, healed by the movement of the Holy Spirit and nothing more. Going to the ends of the earth, to bring Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria into the community of hope, hope that is large enough for the whole world, hope that is sturdy enough to sustain us as we continue to wait. Do not just stand looking up towards heaven, stand in the places of injustice and oppression, stand in the places of power and wealth, stand beside the good and evil, stand

with the sick and dying, stand with the lonely and desperate, stand with the grief-stricken, guided by the Holy Spirit which gives our waiting purpose and hope. Dear, Theophilus, as we follow the story of Acts in the coming weeks, we follow on our mission to wait, not gazing up into heaven but going out among those who need the hope of a world reconciled and redeemed, of a Kingdom which is now but not yet, of the Holy Spirit who guides us, always.