

Restoring the Kingdom Acts 1:1-11 Ascension/7th Sun. Of Easter June 2, 2019

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed 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 and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:6-7

Dear friends in Christ, there was a car show in Clarinda yesterday - with cars from the early 1900s all the way to fairly current sportscars. And particularly with some of the older cars, a lot of work went into restoring them - making them look new. And they did quite the job - the cars were gorgeous. But the question comes to mind - why restore the car? Do you want a car that reminds how gorgeous it used to be, or one you can use now. Are you driving a museum or a car?

And the same question comes to mind this day we celebrate the Ascension. As he teaches them, the disciples ask Jesus if he is now going to restore the kingdom to Israel. And we wonder here if they have learned anything - are they hoping for armies and palaces, for David on his throne. What do they think the kingdom looks like that they want restored to Israel? Jesus had been teaching them with about that the kingdom of God with mustard seeds and leaven. Are they really going back to a sword? Its like they are going back to old ways, trading the glory of Jesus for politics. And we might feel very superior. We know better.

And if we think they are talking about a political kingdom, it might be we’ve spent too long in museums, looking at how quaint they are and feeling superior. Because Jesus does come restore a kingdom, but not a museum. He restores a kingdom where we live as his people. “For you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” A kingdom.

And Jesus confirms this with his response. He tells them it is not for them to know the times, but the restoration is sure. God will empower them with the spirit and they will be his witnesses - not just in Jerusalem, not just in Judea, but in Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The kingdom is restored not just in Jerusalem but to the end of he world. The disciples problem is not that they think wrong, but they think too little. God is not just restoring a kingdom to the Jews, but to true Israel, from every people and tribe and nation.

How small our vision of the kingdom often is, where we don’t even extend it to Israel but to our own family, and say I will just take care of my own. The rest is scary. Or even just ourselves. Where we say I have worked what I need for God and am not interested in sharing. That as long as I go to church, or as long as I hear the word, I’m OK. I don’t need to speak to family or roommate or coworkers about God and his kingdom and how in Christ they too are called to repentance and forgiveness. Because I’m OK. That is not the kingdom. Or maybe we just say I hope there is a church to be buried in. That is not the kingdom. God’s kingdom extends beyond us to the end of the world. And he gives his power and his spirit that we can witness to the kingdom there.

I visited a woman who had disabilities, she could barely talk and had been bedridden. Yet she shared how God was present in her life. She made sure she came and worked in VBS. It shames me, because I feel tired with work and buying and I think of skipping VBS - but she didn’t. She saw that God’s kingdom extended beyond her, and she was a witness to it every place God put her.

Jesus rises not to take the kingdom but to advocate for us and send the spirit so that the kingdom goes beyond his 12 to jerusalem. And judea and samaria and the ends of the world. HE doesn’t let the focus remain on his presence but on the work he did, where he died for the forgiveness not just of the 12 or the disciples, but of all people.

The same question comes to mind as Jesus ascends. While he speaking, he was taken out of their sight. And as they looked up 2 angels spoke. Why are you looking up. He will return. Listening to what he said, they returned to Jerusalem.

We have a 150th anniversary coming up. Let us remember to share the news that we have shared, That Jesus is the Christ, that on him and his death and resurrection we are built, that the gates of hell will not stand against Him, and he is in us.

Look up - surely. See Christ. But look out as well - God is restoring his kingdom.