

Seventh Sunday of Easter

RETURNING TO EARTH

Acts 1:6-14

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Martin Lohrmann

6So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

12Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. 13When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

DIAGNOSIS: Lofty Human Plans

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *A Far, Far Away Kingdom*

The disciples asked the risen Christ if the kingdom of Israel was about to be restored. Would their dreams of becoming a strong, united, and holy people finally be realized? Jesus disappointed them by saying that such things were not theirs to know. In a similar way, we often want our vision of heaven on earth to be made real and we want it now. But such desires are not ours to command and never come from faith.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis/Internal Problem : *A Far, Far Away Savior*

Though Jesus left the disciples with an enigma about the coming kingdom, he promised them the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In this, he even raised the stakes about their question of the kingdom: his reign would not only include a kingdom of Israel but become a power that stretches to the ends of the earth. Having been raised to the right hand of the Father (becoming one with the power of God), Christ was exalted so high that finally a cloud took him out of the disciples' sight. Their hopes and expectations could not be higher. Neither can ours be. Knowing such glory, isn't it unfaithful of us NOT to want to impose God's kingdom on the rest of earth?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Empty Heavens and Empty Hearts*

Despite these high expectations and great confidence in Christ, the disciples were staring at an empty sky and vain desires. Their necks would get stiff looking in the wrong places for salvation. Our energies are also spent in vain when we expect the kingdom of God to be the fulfillment of our loftiest wishes

and dreams. Then we are truly lost and take out our pain on others. And with our faith and actions misdirected, we are lost to God.

PROGNOSIS: Down to Earth Savior

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Back Down to Earth*

Because it is so easy to get lost and even destroyed by lofty and pious pipedreams, God sent two messengers in dazzling clothes to bring the disciples' heads back down to. Those messengers' first reminded Jesus' followers that they should not seek the living among the dead earth (see also Luke 24): Jesus, who had indeed, borne the burden of our misplaced hopes on the cross, was now raised from the dead. And he could be seen rising to his full power at the right hand of the Father (v. 11). But not to remain their indefinitely; for this Jesus, who rose from the dead, did so not for his own glory, but for our sake: To restore God's people (Israel) to God. Jesus ascends into heaven to do us earthly good.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Named and Sent*

So while Christ may have seemingly ascended into a distant heavenly glory, his Spirit will be at work to accomplish God's gracious restoration. That Spirit does not take believers away from the world; instead, believers are sent to share heavenly glory through service to others, one person at a time. The kingdom of God is not an earthly kingdom, or human power, but the power of God to save us from ourselves.

Who are these agents of a heavenly kingdom? They did not have fancy degrees or lofty pedigrees. They were ordinary people named Pete, John, Jim, Andy, Phil, Tom, Bart, Matt, Jimmy 2, Crazy Simon and "The Other Judas." How were these people going to change the world? God gave them help from faithful women and men. Even more, God would soon directly deliver the power and

presence of the Holy Spirit. Named or unnamed, these people would share a real power and love that earthly rulers still cannot comprehend or control.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Prayer and an Upper Room*

What are the tools of this powerful kingdom? The kingdom of God uses neither hard nor soft diplomacy, neither conventional weapons nor conventional wisdom. Instead, God gives us prayer, and fellowship in an upper room (see also Luke 22), and hands with which to serve. Can that possibly be enough? The rest of the Book of Acts, the life of the church, and the grace of God that continues to change lives today testifies that it is. Thy kingdom come.