

Must You Go?

Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 121; Matthew 28:16-20

Reverend Dr. Louise Barger

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On the 40th day after the resurrection the physical presence of the Lord upon the earth is completed. It is time for Him to return to his rightful place in glory. It is time for Him to go home.

Those who gathered with Jesus on the Mount of Olives that day were there by the special invitation of Jesus himself. This was a very personal time for them. This was a day long anticipated and long dreaded, but until now had been little understood. Jesus had attempted to tell them that He would go ahead of them to prepare a place for them to someday join Him, but that possibility seemed so remote. On this day, they were filled with the emotions always associated with separation and the finality of what was about to happen.

It would be unthinkable to imagine that, along with the eleven remaining disciples, that there would not also have been present the women who have followed Jesus and supported his ministry, and the presence of his mother, Mary, for these last moments with Him. Imagine how Mary, his mother, must have felt. This is the son whom she

- had cradled in her arms,
- had carried into Egypt to save his life,
- had watched as He traveled throughout the country doing all kinds of miraculous things
- had stood at the foot of the cross and watched Him die,
- had felt joy, unspeakable, when He was resurrected.

and now, she was going to watch Him leave again, forever, from her presence.

That had always been part of the plan, but now it was becoming a reality. Imagine what his disciples were thinking! Of course, their feelings were nothing like his mother's, but they had plenty of emotions rising up within themselves as well.

They had

- left everything to follow Him,
- endured the hardship of being away from family
- committed their lives to Him as the Messiah,
- been sure that they had lost Him when He died,
- trouble believing that He had been resurrected, and
- now spent time with Him in the 40 days since that miraculous event.

And now, Jesus was leaving them again. He had told them that it was necessary that He leave so that the Holy Spirit could come and be present with everyone, everywhere, all of the time. It was a strange teaching that they had yet to fully understand. As this group was gathered around Him for one last time on this side of heaven, they were still uncertain in their faith and they surely were asking Him, "Must You go?"

It is not unkind of us to realize that they did not have perfect faith in what Jesus had told them. Sometimes we forget that these men and women were real human beings just as we are.

As we study the records of the following days of the ministries of these people, we will watch them as they receive the Holy Spirit and watch them as they become bold beyond what they can imagine today. Their doubts about anything that Jesus has tried to teach them will be overcome as they wait and pray and examine their new relationships with one another, now that the full reality of the acts of Judas must be realized and dealt with. And then, that event that they cannot comprehend as they sit there with Jesus before his ascension, the coming of Holy Spirit upon them just as Jesus was promising, will solidify their faith.

Jesus has one last word for them before He departs. It is a commission for them. It is Holy Orders for them. Commissioning is an interesting word. It means that the one who is commissioned is now under authority of the one who has commissioned them. That person is required to follow the directions of the one who has commissioned him or her, whether it is a government or an individual.

Jesus gave to those disciples what we have come to call the Great Commission. Be sure that we understand that it is a *personal commission*, not just for them, but for each one of us as well. It is this commission that says that the Good News of Jesus is for every tribe and nation, every culture, every race, every ethnicity. There are no limitations.

It is this commission that will eventually send the disciples out of Israel and into other countries of the world. It is this commission that has sent the Church outside of its sanctuaries and into the communities and into the world.

Luke records in the Book of Acts another part of the conversation that Jesus had with those gathered around Him. Luke writes, *"When they had come together, they were asking Him, saying 'Lord, is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom of Israel?'" Jesus said to them, "It is not for you to know times or moments in time which the Father has fixed with his own authority, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."* (Acts 1:6-8)

For us here, that would include Allegany County, New York, the United States, and the remotest part of the world. Some of us are called to go; some of us are called to make it possible for them to go, but *all* are called to participate.

The Apostle Paul, in his writing to the Church in Ephesus, talked more about what this commission meant for the Church then, and for now. Paul wrote, *"Jesus who descended (into earth) is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fulfill all things. And He gave (to those disciples and to all generations to come) some as apostles, some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:10-12)

Jesus is getting them ready for the birthday of the Church and for the continuing growth of the Church. It is obvious from the commission of Jesus, and the teachings of those who would work and write after his ascension, that

- being a disciple is not a spectator sport.
- It is getting into the game and
- sometimes getting roughed up, and
- trusting that our fellow Christians will be there for us when our faith falters, as it sometimes will.

Being a disciple is about using the gifts and abilities that we have been given in ministry. We have been given various gifts so that the Body of Christ, the Church throughout the world may be built up. All who follow Jesus as Lord have received the Holy Spirit within their souls as an assurance that Jesus is always present with them. Now, it is for us to live as his commissioned people by doing in ministry whatever we have been gifted to do, until all shall come to know Jesus as Lord.

Amen.