**May 21st, 2023- Order of Service**

**Scripture:** Acts 1:1-14

1 I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach 2until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father’s promise. “Which,” he said, “you have heard me speak about; 5for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days.”

6So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?”

7He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

9After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. 11They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven.”

12Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day’s journey away. 13When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. 14They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

**Meditating on the Scriptures**

**Message:** “Wait!”

I was speaking to a psychologist friend of mine recently who was talking about something called the “paradoxical intention” technique. You tell the patient to do exactly the thing that you do not want them to do, because people tend to do the opposite of what they are told. I should mention that he didn’t recommend trying this technique, only that it does sometimes work!

We human beings are funny creatures, liking nothing more than the opportunity to do the very things that we know we shouldn’t. If you want to get a group of people to take their time, letting them know that you’re in a hurry is a great way to do it. Most of us are quite capable of wasting vast amounts of time sitting and doing nothing, but when that waiting has a purpose, its suddenly very hard. Most of us hate nothing more than sitting in the queue at Motor Vehicle, or the waiting room at the doctor’s office.

Waiting is hard. Especially when we just want to get on with something, it’s difficult to wait.

But “wait” is precisely what Jesus tells his disciples to do. It’s sort of a strange command, particularly at a time when Jesus is leaving them and handing over his ministry on earth into their care. Why doesn’t Jesus tell them to hit the ground running? Why doesn’t he lay out a groundwork for who, when, what, and where they are to go to?

The book of Acts begins exactly where the Gospel of Luke ends. Luke, the physician, and key member of the early church, is very particular in his approach, and chronicles not only Jesus’ life, but now the life of the early church as well. He wants to share more about all that God is doing, and so he continues his narrative to Theophilus.

Acts begins with a sure and certain account of the Jesus who not only died, but was resurrected and appeared over forty days to many people in many places. He’s no hallucination, he’s no wishful thinking, he’s Jesus raised from the dead. But now, he’s heading to God the Father.

The Holy Spirit is also very present in these first few paragraphs, and we see the next stage of the way that God reveals himself more and more to his people. In the Old Testament, we read mainly about God the Father, although both God’s Word, and God’s Spirit are also very present. In the Gospels, we read mainly about Jesus, but always very aware of God the Father and the Holy Spirit’s presence. Now, in Acts, it is the Holy Spirit that is being sent to live and work in a new way in God’s people.

Jesus spoke about this in our readings from last week, where he promised the disciples that he would not leave them alone. And now we can see this begin to take place, as Jesus ascends to heaven to be with God the Father and promises that he will be sending them his Spirit.

It’s always a bit difficult to speak about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit without separating them. But over and over, we see that we can only understand this mystery when we hold in tension the fact that all are equally God, but even more deeply, that God is one. Everything is done for and with each other. God, through his Word, with the Spirit hovering over the waters, creates the world. At Jesus’ baptism, God speaks to Jesus and the Holy Spirit descends on him. And now, Jesus is going to be with his Father so that he can send the Holy Spirit.

Two vital points show us how vital the Holy Spirit is meant to be in our lives: First, that Jesus tells the disciples to wait and not be on the move until they have the Holy Spirit; and second, that Jesus says it is *better* that he leaves so that he can send the Holy Spirit to live in us and guide us.

As wonderful as it was for Jesus to be on earth, his primary reason for coming had been accomplished. Jesus was born, he lived, and he died so that those who believe in him would not perish, but have live that never ends. He had gathered his disciples, and now it was time for the next stage in his plan.

All throughout the scriptures, God gives his Spirit to people at specific times, to do powerful and wonderful things. When the tent of God’s presence, called the tabernacle, is being built, a man is filled with God’s spirit so that he can build, design, and complete this wonderful structure. Samson is filled with power to pull down pillars. John the Baptist is filled with God’s Spirit even in the womb and called to prepare the way for Jesus. And at Jesus’ baptism, we see Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit as he begins his ministry of healing and letting everyone know the good news that God’s kingdom was coming near.

Often I think we are intimidated or scared or weary of the Holy Spirit and what he does. But the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in everything. From woodworking and handcrafts, to art, to hospitality, to administration, to teaching, to healing, to prophesy- God longs to work through us in everything that we do. And this same Spirit that worked in Jesus is the Spirit that Jesus sends his disciples back to Jerusalem to wait for. This is God’s kingdom at work in the world. This is God coming close and changing not just political structures, but the hearts of regular people.

The disciples are excited when Jesus tells them about all of this. “Is this when you’re going to restore Israel’s kingdom?” they ask. They’re ready for him to finally do what they’ve wanted him to do the whole time.

But Jesus doesn’t bite.

Because that isn’t what he’s wants them to be focussed on. “That’s not for you to know.” He says. “But you will go out into Judea, and Samaria, and all the world and let them know the good news. You’ll be able to tell them about all that I’ve done, and all I’m still doing.” They want to get their kingdom back, Jesus wants them to bring his kingdom to everyone.

It’s the pull that we all feel. We know what we want, and really, we’d prefer if Jesus would just get around to doing it. And in the meantime, we’ll get doing all that we can to do it on our own. But Jesus says wait. Jesus says to wait until we can be sure that we’re doing his work, not ours. Following Jesus means that it’s his timeline, not ours. It’s his agenda, not ours. It’s his power, not ours.

There are no ends to the agendas around us now. Each of us have one. We want to get what we want, how we want, when we want it. But even when we get it, we’re no happier than we were before. We move on to the next thing. As time moves along we look back at the things that seemed so important at the time, but turned out to be a waste. But God’s agenda is different, because it lasts. It’s different, because it forces us to give up our own ideas and trust in God. It forces us to have faith.

And while that really is difficult for us, it’s also wonderful. It’s freeing to be able to rely not on our own narrow experience, but on God’s total knowledge. It’s freeing not to have to rely on our own feeble power when God says, “here, use mine!”

Our problem as human beings is not that we want too much, or that we ask God too much, or expect too much. It really isn’t. Our problem is exactly the opposite. We are very happy with the scraps. We’re happy with things that don’t last, and that don’t truly matter. Jesus is offering us the gift of being filled and helped by the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead, and most of us would rather a bit of extra money, or pleasure, or power. We don’t want too much, we want far too little.

But what if we dared to do what the disciples did, and wait? What if we were willing to trust what Jesus said, and didn’t make a backup plan? What if we dared to want more than just “getting by” and waited and prayed until we had nothing less than the very Spirit of God living and working within us?

If we are wait and trust God, we will see this promise at work in our lives. And which of us don’t need more of God’s power at work in our lives? In fact, I’m quite sure you already have experienced God move in your life in one way or another. But what if God working in our lives wasn’t the exception, but the norm? It’s possible. In fact, it’s more than possible, it’s a promise from God.

Let’s pray that God would help us to experience that promise together.