

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY MAY 21 2023

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“And Just Like That”

Based on Luke 24:44-53

And just like that, He was gone. After:

- 3 Years of Ministry
 - 37 Miracles
 - Feeding 9000 People (there were two stories)
 - Countless Teaching Moments
 - Tempted 3 Times
 - 1 New Commandment
 - 1 Crucifixion
 - 1 Resurrection
 - Appearing 10 Times
- Mysteriously
He was gone, just like that.

And I've got to ask:

- Do you think that the disciples realized that this time, Christ was really not coming back?
- Do you think that the disciples believed that 'the one the Father was going to send next' was not a Jesus 2.0?
- Do you think that the disciples really understood: that what was to come next, rested on their shoulders, their leadership, their courage?

Luke's account of the Ascension has the disciples returning to Jerusalem, joyful and jubilant, waiting in great anticipation in the temple. Which seems rather odd to me. Was it not a mere month and a bit ago, that one of the greatest dangers to Christ was the temple, or should I say, the priests of the temple, who plotted and schemed with Pilate to ensure His death? And now it's the party place?

But the other story of the Ascension in Acts is not helpful either. In this account, the disciples were found wandering around bewildered after Christ disappeared, until finally, two angels showed up, tapped them on the shoulders and said, "What are you standing around here for?"

In one account it would appear that the weight of responsibility to come has not yet set into the minds of the disciples. And in the second account, the doubt and worry are beginning to slither into their hearts, as fear always does when we are vulnerable or uncertain.

“It's up to you now.”

For all that Jesus said to the disciples in those last moments together, He didn't say those words, but that's what He meant.

It's up to you now.
My time is finished.
I have run my race.
I can do no more.
I need to get out of the way, so that you can take the lead.
And you won't take the lead as long as I am here with you, because all you do is lean on Me, instead of leaning into God: facing your fears, finding your courage, and being the leaders I have been trying for so long to mold you into.

I have tried to open your hearts and minds to the scriptures.

I have shown you that the prophecies of the past have become the realities of the present.

I have promised you that something else is coming to take My place and stay with you.

(paraphrase of Luke 24:44-49)

But my time is done.
I must go.

What happens next is up to you.

Now there is a difficult phrase to deal with.

Because there is no way to skirt around the command, and the responsibility that Christ gave the disciples. All the usual excuses don't work when your Saviour looks you in the eye and says, 'What happens next is up to you?'

All the:

- I'm not talented enough for that.
- I don't have the education for that.
- I haven't been trained.
- I don't like to talk in public.
- I need to stay home and keep the family happy.
- I'm uncomfortable in new situations.
- I've never travelled.
- I'm not ready.
- I'm a little afraid of all this.
- I don't want to die like you did. <with barely a whisper>

None of those excuses worked, did they, when the disciples looked at those angels with their bewildered expressions, or with their child-like understanding that all they had to do was wait in the temple and Jesus would fix everything just like He always had.

What happens next is up to us. (You could feel it coming, that twist at the end of the sermon, couldn't you?)
The church is floundering in first world countries.

The faithful are fewer.
The success stories are scant.

And we have lots of excuses, just like the disciples:

- It's a post-Christendom world.
- It's a post-COVID world.
- It's because of Sunday sports.
- It's because society is too accommodating and ambivalent.
- It's because families don't prioritize faith at home.
- It's because politics and religion don't mix well.

All valid points.
And Jesus simply replies, "What happens next is up to you."

So what will happen next, here at Knox?

- Do we hide behind excuses?
- Or do we thrive in spite of the excuses?
- Do we find ways around the obvious issues?
- Do we decide, as a congregation of the living Christ: "We're going to make something happen here"

Because I can tell already, "Something is happening here."

- The energy in this room is different this spring.
- The smiles are warmer this spring.
- The enthusiasm for Christ is growing this spring.

And just like that, the Holy Spirit has breathed new life into us.

So what happens next?