

“In the meantime ...”

June 5, 2011

Text: Acts 1:6-14, 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

I.

Christians are an expectant people—an expectant people tilting forward, looking into the future with hope and promise.

In many ways, we’re like a family peering into the crib at a new-born infant—gazing at the child sleeping, moving ... commenting on the baby’s features ... comparing the child to one family member or another ... and full of expectation.

After the resurrection—which is itself confusing enough—confusion abounds. According to Luke, who—as you will remember—is the author of both the gospel of LUKE and Acts (from which I just read), after Jesus’ suffering he presented himself *alive* to his disciples during a forty day period, speaking to them about the kingdom of God.

- He orders them to remain in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit which, in the Christian tradition, is next Sunday, the day of PENTECOST.
- And he tells them they will be baptized with the Holy Spirit *not many days from now*.

So, what does this mean: *not many days from now*? Is it two or three days ... four or five days ... a week? In any event, they are to wait.

In case you haven’t noticed, there’s a lot of *waiting* in the Bible.

1. Waiting for the birth of Jesus ...
2. waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit ...
3. waiting for Jesus’ return.

Again, waiting is as common theme. The waiting is about *looking forward*. It’s about hope.

II.

In the reading I just shared with you, curious about all that is happening, the disciples ask Jesus: ***Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?***

You see, many of the disciples assumed that this was Jesus’ function (i.e., the role of the savior): to eliminate the Roman occupation of Palestine and to restore Israel to her rightful place in God’s hierarchy of nations.

Jesus' responds, saying: *it's not for you to know the times or periods that God has set.*

Jesus goes on saying, *But 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.*

And then, just like that, he's whisked away—lifted up—and taken out of their sight. Then, the disciples have this mystical experience where two white-robed *messengers of God* tell them:

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

In other words, he will come again. So, the disciples and Jesus' other followers have lots to wait for, *in the meantime*:

1. They're waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit ... *not many days from now* ...
2. and for Jesus' return ... his *coming again*, or the Second Coming ...

But what are they to do **in the meantime**?

III.

What the disciples and Jesus' other followers end up doing is (1) sticking together and (2) praying. Sticking together is always a good idea, of course—particularly when you're such a minority group and you're not sure what's coming. And it's always good to pray to make ourselves more fully present to what's going on.

But these *in the meantime* questions and challenges are always part of our lives.

Many of you heard about the prediction a couple of weeks ago, by some *religious fanatic*, that *the rapture* was going to be taking place, signifying that the faithful followers of Christ would be *caught up* with Jesus in the heavens and that the world would be coming to an end.

These sorts of predictions have been common place since the dawning of our Christian faith. While there is some biblical suggestion of *end-of-the-world* scenarios, to actually make these predictions and recruit a group of naïve and vulnerable followers to support you is egregiously manipulative.

This most recent prediction was for **May 21st**. On Saturday, May 21st, the rapture was supposed to happen and the world as we know it was supposed to come to an end. I don't know how many times this sort of pretentious claim has been made over the two thousand years of Christianity but it's been a fairly common occurrence.

If you think about it, the person making the prediction, has power over his or her faithful followers until the predicted date comes and goes with nothing happening ... just another day on planet earth.

Then, often times—as in this case—the person goes back to the Bible and to a new theory of calculations and comes up with another future date.

But again, the question: **What do we do in the meantime.**

IV.

There's a cartoon where two people with walking sticks in hand are climbing a mountain in knee-deep snow. The caption reads:

**Keep climbing upwards! You may never reach the top
but at least you're going in the right direction.**

All we can do in this life, friends, is keep moving forward ... keep doing whatever we can to make things better ... to make for a better world, a better community, a better church, a better family. We may never actually *get there*, but by working towards it, at least we'll be going in the right direction.

In the meantime, what do we do?

1. What do we do waiting to grow up and to become an adult?
2. What do we do waiting for the a relationship that leads to marriage ... and children to follow ...
3. What do we do waiting for our career to begin, for which we've been preparing and preparing?
4. What do we do waiting for our new diet and workout regimen to bring the desired results?
5. What do we do waiting for things in our lives to fall into place as we wait and wait for peace and the dawning of a new day?

In the meantime, *what do we do?*

V.

Perhaps the answer to all of this is really pretty simple. It may be just a matter of getting back to the basics in life and doing the simple things of life right and using our common sense.

Some years back **Robert Fulghum** wrote a best-selling book entitled, *All I Really Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten*.

In writing the book, he says, over time, I became increasingly aware that *Most of what I really need to know about how to live, I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom, it turned out, was in the sandboxes of the Nursery School.*

These are the things I learned. CHECK IT OUT!

1. Share everything ...
2. Play fair ...
3. Don't hit people ...

4. Put things back where you found them ...
5. Clean up your own mess ...
6. Don't take things that aren't yours ...

7. Say you're sorry when you hurt someone ...
8. Take a nap every afternoon ...
9. When you go out into the world, watch for traffic, hold hands and stick together.

For living **in the meantime**, this is all pretty solid advice.

VI.

Our waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit and for the coming of Christ is hopeful, active waiting. To begin with, we should never take it literally.

What the essence of the Second Coming is about is hope. The idea of the Second coming emerged as a *social hope* in the early Christian communities where, often, persecution and human suffering were widespread.

- When Christ comes back, THEN peace with justice would win the day.
- When Christ returns, THEN suffering and misery will cease.
- This was a HOPE that the people held on to.

To wait—for the coming of the Spirit and for the day of Christ's return—is to actively participate in the redemptive completion of God's purposes which are worked out through us.

In the meantime is our life. We're always waiting for something, moving towards something. We are an ***in the meantime*** community, seeking always to embody Jesus' life-giving presence.

Jesus' coming (his birth), his resurrection, his ascension back to God (which our scripture reading alludes to this morning), and his hoped-for return are all about a reassuring love

that God is with us. Which means that our lives are about love. *In the meantime*, therefore:

- Share everything ...
- play fair ...
- don't hit people ...
- do your share of the work ...
- don't take what's not yours ...
- say you're sorry when you hurt others ...
- and to the best that you can, hold hands and stick together ...

That's it! That's a guideline for living. In other words: *be* a good person, *do* the right thing and *fill* your world with love.

And to God be the power and glory forever and ever.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com