

I.

When my children were younger, and we were starting out on a trip, we often would not even make it to the interstate before the complaints and questions would begin. “I’m hungry! Did we pack any snacks?” “Can we listen to music?” “Can we NOT listen to music?” “Tell Samuel to stop touching me.”

We would pass out snacks, turn on the radio, turn off the radio, and encourage them to leave each other alone only to be hit with the most infamous question of all: “Are we there yet?”

At first we might chuckle and remind the kids that we had just started driving and hadn’t actually even gotten out of town. We would remind them that we still had a long way to go. But as the trip wore on, the questions would continue. Soon we began to wonder if the trip was worth the irritation. Because it turns out that you can’t skip the miles in between one place and another. The only way to get where you’re headed is to keep going.

II.

In our Scripture from Acts today, the disciples want to know if their journey is almost over. After all they had seen and experienced, after Jesus’s ministry, his crucifixion, his death...after Jesus was raised from the dead...after Jesus met them unexpectedly in locked up rooms, on the road heading home, at a table breaking bread, on the beach with full nets and breakfast...surely they were nearing the end of the road. So they begin ask: “Is now the time that you will restore the kingdom to Israel, Lord?”

“Is now when you are going to do it, Lord? Is now when justice will be served, when wrong will be made right, when suffering will end? Are we there yet?” Like children grown weary and restless from the long journey, the disciples were ready and eager for their hopes to

finally be fulfilled. After all, they had already been through so much. They had already been traveling for so long.

And, let's be honest, it would have made a great end to the story. If Jesus had come back in victory and set all things right, right then and there. The disciples would have known all their pain and trouble had been worth it. They would have been able to share in the glory and the triumph! But that isn't what happens. Instead, Jesus simply says, "No. We aren't there yet. We still have a long way to go."

III.

It's human nature to focus on the endpoint. We tell our children to have dreams and goals and then do whatever they can to achieve them. We make five year plans and create bullet point lists about how we are going to get where we want to be. We save for retirement, hoping that by the time we get there we will have the energy to enjoy it. We are always looking ahead, trying to figure out what needs to happen next, looking forward to the moment when we will finally feel as though we have arrived.

But while it is good to have goals and plans, we can sometimes become so focused on the future that we forget that we are living right here and right now. We fail to nurture our relationships well or we fail to appreciate the small blessings of each day. We become anxious or hyper-focused on things right outside our grasp, losing sight of the things right in front of us. We keep wondering: "When will I get where I need to be? When will I have enough or be enough or have finally done enough to feel satisfied, happy, fulfilled?"

Maybe we too, like the disciples, have decided we have been through enough and just want to get to the endpoint already! "Are we there yet?"

IV.

It must have been hard for the disciples to hear Jesus say that they still had a long way to go. It must have been hard for them to find out that they couldn't even circle a date on their calendar for retirement, but instead had to simply wait and hope for a future they couldn't control. We can empathize. After all, it is hard for us to be reminded that there are things outside of our control as well.

The good news is that after Jesus says all of that, he keeps talking. And he utters one of the most hopeful words in this entire passage: He says: "But." He says, "This is not the time and you don't get to know the time. That's up to God. BUT."

But! Even in the midst of your uncertainty. Even in the midst of your questions. Even in the midst of your discomfort you should know this: God has a plan for you. God has things for you to do, even as you wait! In fact, God is going to use you to bless the world!

IV.

Before the disciples can pin Jesus down on any more specifics, right in that powerful moment of commissioning, Jesus is taken up into the clouds, disappearing from the disciples' sight. Their ears are still ringing. Their heads are full of questions. Their hearts are breaking as they watch their Lord depart. And then two men in white appear beside them.

I think that when those two men robed in white show up, we are meant to remember when two men met the women at the tomb, asking, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" These two men, clothed in white, ask another question, "Why do you stand looking up to

heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you, will come in the same way as you saw him go.”

Which is to say, don't just stand there looking up. It's time for you to do what Jesus said. Go back to Jerusalem and wait. Prepare your hearts to receive the Spirit of God. The Spirit that is coming towards you even now. And know that when that Spirit meets you, you will be empowered to do this work. To be witnesses! Witnesses to all you have seen and heard and now know to be true. The next leg of your journey is about to begin.

VI.

Maybe, like those first disciples, we had a plan for what God's movement and work would look like in our lives and in our world. Maybe we had a destination in mind and a timetable for our travel. Those first disciples wanted power to be restored to Jerusalem. And we have our own hopes and plans as well. But the story of Acts and the movement of God reminds us that our plans are not always God's plans.

Instead of restoring power to Jerusalem, the Spirit of God met the disciples there, bringing them power beyond their own resources. With the Spirit's help, the disciples continued their journey, often taken by surprise by the movement of God. Moving out from that one center of faith, the Spirit led Jesus's followers into all the highways and byways of life. Judea. Samaria. Even the ends of the earth. Each time they moved further afield, the disciples were reminded of the breadth and depth of all that they still did not understand. The story and the journey they were on were much bigger and much longer than they could have known when they first asked, “Are we there yet?”

And as the Spirit led them out into the world, the disciples learned that wherever they found themselves, God was with them. And because of that, when they were hard-pressed or imprisoned, they could still be witnesses. When they were traveling from one place to another, they could still be witnesses. When they were in business meetings making decisions, they could still be witnesses. When they were just scraping by, they could still be witnesses. The Holy Spirit had invited them into the work of God that they could not control but were blessed to watch unfold. The work that they could point out to others. The work they were all invited to join.

My friends, that is our calling too. Instead of wondering when we will arrive at the destinations we had in mind, Jesus reminds us: “God is holding the map and God is steering the wheel. BUT: Even now, even in this moment, you can be my witnesses.” Which means, of course, that we are not the ones in charge. But instead, as witnesses, we are passengers on a better journey than we could have charted out for ourselves, carried by the Spirit that holds us fast.

So let’s not keep asking “Are we there yet?” It’s the wrong question right now. Because the journey has just begun. Instead, let us remember that God is in the driver’s seat. And today, we have been invited once again, to join him on what is sure to be a wild, Spirit-filled, ride.

Amen.

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