

Keep It Simple, Stupid!

This past Sunday, we concluded our sermon series called “Journeying With Jesus” by exploring the two simple final instructions the risen Christ gave to his followers.

1. Warm up question: To help us related to the pain the disciples felt after Jesus’ crucifixion, Jeff reminded us of the words Robert F. Kennedy spoke here in Indianapolis on the day Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. Think about a day of great national or international tragedy that has occurred during your lifetime. Where were you? How did you hear the news? How did you feel?
2. After the bleakness of Jesus’ death and burial, on the morning of the third day, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary mother of James found the empty tomb, encountered an angel saying, “he is not here, he is risen,” and then saw Jesus himself (Matthew 28). They raced back to tell the others what they experienced. Suppose you had been there when Mary Magdalene and the others shared their news, what would you have felt? How do you think you would have reacted?
3. Read Acts 1:1-11. Here we’re told about Jesus’ final post-resurrection appearance to his disciples. Verse 6 states the pressing question on the hearts and minds of the disciples, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” In other words, they were trying to figure out, “What’s next?” They assumed Jesus was going to jump right to the end of the age and fulfill their deeply ingrained interpretations of end time prophecies, i.e., Jesus the Messiah would become the recognized political ruler of Israel, conquer the Romans and everyone else by force of arms, and establish an everlasting rule of peace and justice.
 - a. What do you make of Jesus’ reply in verse 7? What do you think we’re supposed to learn from this?
 - b. Why are so many people of faith, even in our time, so preoccupied with figuring out when and how the world will end? Do you think this preoccupation is good or bad – and why?
 - c. The disciples really struggled to understand Jesus’ plans, which differed substantially from how popular theology at the time defined the role and mission of the Messiah. Even after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the disciples were still reverting back to the theology they had always been taught, resisting the new approach Jesus was laying out. What can/should we learn from that?
4. After telling his disciples they shouldn’t be preoccupied with figuring out the “end of the age,” Jesus went on to say what they should focus on. He gave us a simple two-part mission: receive the Holy Spirit, and be witnesses for Jesus to the ends of the earth. The same two-fold instruction was given in another resurrection story, John 20, where Jesus invites his disciples to receive the Holy Spirit and says, “As God has sent me, so send I you.” Let’s focus first on the “receiving the Spirit” part.

- a. How would you define the “Holy Spirit”?
 - b. Throughout the Bible, the Holy Spirit is credited with giving people insight and power to act in profound spiritual ways. Jeff told a story about how the Spirit prompted Royce Moore, living in Montana at the time, to pray for his Dad, visiting Italy at the time, at precisely the moment his Dad was almost killed in a car accident. In your own life, have you ever had a profound experience of the Holy Spirit? Tell us what happened.
 - c. Jeff said that “receiving” the Holy Spirit is the beginning, not the end, of an important process of learning to live in such a way that we are consistently “filled with the Holy Spirit” (e.g., Acts 4:8). As best you understand it, how does a person “receive” the Holy Spirit? And how does a person become “filled” with the Holy Spirit?
 - d. Jeff suggested that being “filled with the Spirit” results from establishing a regular spiritual rhythm that feeds the Spirit within us. Although the particular rhythm that feeds the Spirit in each of us may differ, some of things people often do to feed the Spirit are: daily prayer and Scripture meditation, listening to spiritual music, singing to God, weekly worship, spiritual small groups, service opportunities, generous giving, etc. What are the core elements of your personal strategy for feeding and nurturing the Spirit within you? Are you being faithful to that strategy?
5. When we take care to receive and feed the Spirit within us, we put ourselves in a position to have enough spiritual power and insight to fulfill Jesus’ second instruction, i.e., to do what Jesus was sent to do – to Jesus in the world.
- a. When Marsha Stevens sang at our church recently, she shared a song that says people really don’t care about the name on the sign of your church or the details of your personal theology. The only thing people really care about is, “Can you be Jesus to me?” Do you think that’s true? Why or why not?
 - b. Jeff told about a time he encountered the risen Christ through a complete stranger who stopped to help him in an auto accident. Tell us about a time when someone was Jesus to you.
 - c. Can you think of a time recently when you feel you were able to be Jesus to someone in some way large or small? How did that feel to you?
 - d. The premise of Sunday’s sermon was that being a Christian can be boiled down to two simple points: consistently feed the Spirit within you, then let the power of the Spirit inside you help you to be Jesus to others. Do you buy that? Is that too simplistic? Why or why not?