

Are We There Yet?

A sermon expositing Acts 1:1-11

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It was what life is supposed to be. Not long from this time each year as I grew up my family and I would make our first trip of the summer to my grandparents' lake house. I know I've mentioned this magical place to you before. There were boats and there were jet skis and there were water slides. There was volleyball and horseshoes. There were hamburgers and hot dogs and homemade orange crush ice cream. Life at the lake was life as it should be and so it tugged at my soul near the end of the school year every year to be there.

The lake house was about 55 minutes from our house, which as 6, 7, 8 year old kid was an eternity. I remember on the ride trying to count as high as I could, or playing "I spy" with my sister, or interpreting the shapes of the clouds out the window – whatever I could do to pass the time until we got there. Then when the tension had built as much as I could stand, I'd waited as long as I possibly could I would say, (say it with me if you can feel it coming) "Are we there yet!?"

Usually by the time I uttered that question we hadn't even made it to the interstate! I would ask about every seven miles for the duration of the trip, "Are we there yet!?"

This question though, comes up in more places than the back seat of a lake bound station wagon. In fact, it seems to me that "Are we there yet?" is woven into the fabric of the human psyche. We all know what it's like to wonder if we've arrived. We find ourselves in life waiting, anticipating, fearing, hoping, longing for the future to be known now! After two and a half months of inconvenient and isolating precautions during a pandemic we're all looking at what it's going to take to get us safely back to a more sustainable way of life. We're all wondering, "Are we there yet?" But even outside of Covid-time the question is common. Those who have ever waited for lab or test results know precisely what it means to wonder, "Are we there yet?" So do recent college graduates or really anyone who knows *something* is coming and might even know *what* is coming, but hasn't seen it yet.

Consider the disciples of Jesus. As the gospel writer, Luke, racks focus to recenter his story from Jesus to his disciples they find themselves in what they hope will be a culminating moment. They hope they've arrived!

The journey given us in the gospel tells of their having been called into a life of mysterious, but faithful purpose with Jesus. Travelling the Galilean countryside with him, they began to believe that he could actually be one who could bring about God's kingdom. When their life with him led them to Jerusalem they at first felt their hopes dashed in horror as they saw him beaten, bruised, bloodied, and crucified. But then – resurrection. Hope was restored, but we often forget – hope was not yet fulfilled. They wanted fulfillment, they wanted to "be there", and so they asked, "Are we there yet?"

Well, they didn't ask exactly that. One among them we're told said, "Lord, is this the time [...] is this the time when you will restore the kingdom?" Are we there yet? They were looking for God's purposes to be accomplished and they hoped they had arrived. They'd lived and learned with Jesus, they'd watched him die and experienced resurrection, surely this is the culminating moment, surely we must be there!

We modern disciples are no strangers to wondering when we'll arrive either. It isn't too grand of a statement to say that our purposes are God's purposes – or at least that we strive toward that end – and so we hope that the work we're doing is getting somewhere. We hope that our collecting, housing, and distributing food for those who need it through the Brighton Food Depot is moving at least a tiny bit toward a world without

hunger. We hope that in collecting diapers and necessary items for Cameron Community Ministries that we're getting on down the road a bit toward a sustainable way of life for everyone. We hope that in fostering a wide-open community that we're headed toward a world where everyone has a place. When we magnify these collective things we do by the things that we each as individuals do to move us in the direction of God's Kingdom *and* the things that a million other communities like First Baptist do it is only natural that we wonder sometimes, "Aren't we there yet!?"

Those original disciples must have felt their hope was right in front of them. I'm not sure we feel that close, but we are at least oriented in the same direction. All of our work and hope are centered on "getting there". When, risen Christ, when will we be there? Is it now?

Jesus's answer to his disciples then and now is a curious one to me. When I drive anywhere that's any distance at all I have to know how many miles the trip is or have a GPS device. Counting down the miles to arrival is part of what helps me endure the time. I take classes at the gym when we're not in the middle of a pandemic. Certain exercises are set to last a certain amount of time and I get very grumpy if someone steps in front of the clock. Knowing precisely how long I have hold a plank or do jump lunges or whatever I'm doing helps me find the strength to do it. Likewise, when I run, I wear a GPS watch and every quarter mile I check on my current pace, average pace, time lapsed, and distance and I get an updated sense of when I'll be done. I confess that I may be a bit excessive in this regard, but don't we all like to have a sense of when we're going to get where we're going. Doesn't that sense help us in our journey? Wouldn't it be nice to have that when it pertains to the coming of a time when there will be no more hunger or pain or violence? Wouldn't it be nice to have a GPS telling us exactly when we will arrive at God's kingdom?

And yet Jesus, as is so often the case, does not see my wisdom. He gives no semblance of an answer to the timing question, only a general insinuation that the time is not now and that it isn't for the disciples to know. It's almost like he's *trying* to make them pensive! He wants them on pins and needles! But he doesn't just set them up to twiddle their thumbs or play "I spy" for all eternity. No, in fact as Luke tells us that Jesus whisks away into the heavens they're caught staring into the clouds for only a moment before two men wearing the characteristic white robe uniform of God's messengers call their gaze back to earth, back to mission. Even that doesn't take place before Jesus has promised that God's very spirit will be with them as they become the primary carriers of resurrection throughout the world. You see, for the first disciples, "Are we there yet?" may have begun as a longing for fulfillment, but it became a call to unyielding service. It is the same longing their question betrays that fuels their activity throughout the rest of Acts. Their healing and preaching and teaching and the whole underpinnings of the beginning of the worldwide church is propelled by a longing that continually checks in to ask again, "Are we there yet?"

And we know well what the answer to that question is. We sense the number of places that seem to be moving backwards in developing the kind of peace and justice God longs for. We know that whatever material needs we might be able to support, there are so many more that we can't. We know that this pandemic has been a substantial setback in virtually every category of work toward justice, peace, civility, equity. The answer isn't just, "We're not there yet," but also, "and it isn't for you to know the time."

While recognizing that we're not there yet and indeed often seem to be moving backwards can be demoralizing and exhausting, it is the very same recognition that fueled the work of Jesus's disciples.

Are we there yet? It's a question that leads us in the direction of the hope of kingdom come, but doesn't let us off the hook of playing a role within. It's a question that comes along with the promise of God's Spirit moving among us and within us. It acknowledges the reality and presence of the kingdom already breaking in around us, but spurs us on to further action even when we can't see the endgame.

So take stock friends. We aren't there yet and we don't know when we will be.
Thanks be to God, amen.