

I heard a song recently that seems to have made a home in my soul. This song isn't new and it's in our green hymnal (number 860, in case you want to look it up), so maybe you've heard it or even sung it:

“If you believe as I believe,
and we, together, pray.
The Holy Spirit must come down,
and set God's people free.”

I was mentally humming this song when I read today's first lesson. Our lectionary has chosen to begin today's lesson at verse six, which plainly identifies what was foremost in the hearts of Jesus' closest followers:

“Lord, is this the time when
you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”

We post-modern people, with our 20/20 hindsight, often notice that Jesus' disciples didn't seem to understand that Jesus didn't come for a political purpose; Jesus didn't come to save the Israelites from their Roman conquerors. We know this, but we often fail to appreciate just how oppressive the Israelites found Roman rule. What they (the Israelites) couldn't understand is how they (God's people) had ended up being ruled by people who had no respect for God. Those self-same Israelites must have believed,

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There was even more than one historical precedent for this belief. Hadn't God heard the cries—heard the fervent prayers—of their enslaved ancestors and freed them from Egypt? And hadn't God heard the cries—heard the fervent prayers—of their exiled ancestors and freed them from Babylon?

What our lectionary's approach lacks by placing the Israelite's lament at the start of today's lesson is a way to immediately put the apostles' question into context. As we read on, we become aware that—except for Judas Iscariot—Jesus' original 11 disciples were with Jesus on the Mount of Olives on that day, 40 days after his resurrection. And, if we flip backwards to the end of the Gospel of Luke, which was written by the same author as today's lesson, we discover that Jesus and his 11 apostles had eaten together, and that Christ had both taught them how

scripture foretold his crucifixion and resurrection and he had taught them a LOT about the Kingdom of God.

In case you have ever searched for evidence that there were women among Jesus’ disciples, here is some of the evidence. Did you notice that there were “certain women,” including Jesus’ mother, plus Jesus’ brothers receiving this last-moments-on-earth teaching by Christ Jesus? But I digress...

So, here they were, all of them, together, on the Mount of Olives and Christ Jesus was preparing to leave them. This is when they asked their one last question while he was still with them in person. What did they ask?

“Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”

In other words, they asked Jesus **their most important question**, “If it’s the Kingdom of God we’re talking about, isn’t God’s Kingdom the very political system I want, the one I think is fair and just, the one without the Romans in charge, the one I think you promised to give us?” These disciples longed for the glory years of Israel, of roughly 1,000 years before, when King David built an empire by defeating their neighbors. The apostles confused God’s Kingdom for their desired political system, which was just for Israel, whereas God’s Kingdom is for the whole world.

However, we still confuse God’s Kingdom for our own desired political system, don’t we? So how much more would a people who were under actual foreign subjugation confuse the two?

“Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”

So, I ask you, what would YOU ask Christ Jesus, if you had one in-person opportunity to ask Jesus a question? Any ideas?

Whatever our question for Jesus, Jesus might remind us that we have something his original apostles didn’t have when they asked him their question. Jesus might remind US that when he bid in-person adieu to his disciples, they hadn’t yet have his Spirit activated within them. He told them to WAIT for that Spirit.

We already have Christ’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit who reveals God to us and urges us to be in relationship with God. The Spirit’s power is within us, accessible to us, to

accomplish those things which God would have us do. So, whatever we ask of Christ Jesus is within our grasp, if only what we ask is what God desires for us.

We, who have all so recently learned this anew and demonstrated this for our world, should know that we can accomplish whatever purpose God gives us if it is truly God’s mission and not just our own aspiration.

Of course, one person who is truly doing God’s mission usually attracts others who are led by the Spirit to help. In this way, God works through groups of people, communities of people, rather than just through lone individuals. But often the call to action begins through one individual or a small group of individuals. And usually, the people God calls to do big things are unlikely people, the very people that others judge least likely to succeed; this is so that, in the end, the world will know that this was God’s work, not ours.

Our lesson today identifies the people who Christ Jesus called and empowered to change the world. These were unlikely people, and many faded into obscurity even though they ensured that the whole world knew about Christ Jesus. Our lesson today identifies them, all but one. They would very soon be joined by Matthias, whom the Spirit led them to call as a replacement for Judas Iscariot.

I can guarantee you that, had these people not carried out their Holy Spirit-inspired and assisted God-mission of telling the whole world about Christ Jesus, WE would never have heard of them. The Romans also played an important role in assisting the Holy Spirit and the apostles in telling the world about Christ Jesus: their conquest of most of Europe and the road system they established aided these Christian missionaries greatly in their carrying out Christ’s mission of evangelism.

In these ways, the people listed in today’s lesson succeeded in the mission that Christ assigned them. The only way we can explain their achievement is this:

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There is very good news for us today. WE are post-Pentecost people. We already HAVE the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, activated by the sacred “yes” of our baptism. What is the desire of OUR heart, Church of the Resurrection? For whom is the Holy Spirit urging us to pray to be “freed?”