

Marching Orders

Series: Hanging On in an Upside-Down World

Acts 1:1-11

May 9, 2021

Welcome again to Germantown United Methodist Church. I want to invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin, or if you are online, grab your spiritual journal and take notes.

We are in the midst of a series entitled “Hanging On in an Upside-Down World.” Many feel their world is upside down.

GETTING OLD. 2ND COVID SHOT MADE ME WEAK. TWEKKED MY BACK. MY GOLDEN BUCKEYE CARD YESTERDAY.

Life changes, health changes, relationship changes. Life seems to be disrupted repeatedly by obstacles and detours and troubles.

The world seemed to turn upside down for the followers of Jesus of Nazareth when He was crucified. So, during our message series “Hanging On in an Upside-Down World,” we’re looking at the appearances of Jesus after Easter and learning how to handle the issues, interruptions and complications of life.

And during our series, we have learned some things. We have printed them on page 5 for you:

1. When your world is turned upside down, Jesus calls your name. He comes to you. You may not recognize Him at first, but He is there.
2. You need to Stay Close to the followers of Christ.
3. You need to remember that you don’t have the whole story.
4. You need to listen to the witness of the Holy Spirit in your heart. God is trying to speak to you; He is trying to warm your heart.
5. You need Peace in the midst of Fear, Worry about Outside Forces, Forgetting the teaching of the Lord, Not knowing what to do, and feeling hopeless.
6. You need to trust that even in the confusion when your world seems upside down, Jesus is still Lord and Master.
7. Whatever situation you are facing right now, when your world seems upside down, love is the right response.
8. Whatever situation you are facing right now, your solution to your situation is probably not God’s solution. He has a plan that is far better for you than you could ever dream.

Today’s message is called “Getting Back on Track.”

We have two passages of Scripture today. The first one comes from the book of Acts. The Book of Acts is written by Luke, who also wrote the Gospel, and it is about the birth and growth of the Christian Church. Our passage comes from the first chapter and it gives the account of Jesus’ ascension.

I’m going to read from Acts 1:1-11:

In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. Once when he

was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?” He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”¹

This passage is the last earthly encounter of the resurrected Jesus with His disciples. At the end of the reading is the Ascension. Luke’s Gospel records it this way:

Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven.²

In Acts, Luke adds:

... He was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud. As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!”³

IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT END OF THE WORLD PREDICTIONS, JUST REMEMBER: JESUS IS COMING BACK.

Now, consider the disciples in our passage. They were still absolutely clueless. After everything they have been through: 3 years walk with Jesus and listening to Him (hello, He had been talking about the Kingdom of God not the Kingdom of Israel), after seeing all the miracles. Then they watched Him submit to the government, the Roman government, to be crucified. He died and was buried.

Then of course came the resurrection that just blew them away. If you need any more proof that Jesus was more than a man, that He is God’s Son, the resurrection and His appearances to them, sometimes through locked doors, should have straightened them out.

But they were still clueless. You may be getting tired of me saying that. You may be thinking, “Their worlds can’t be upside down any more.” You would be wrong.

The Bible says, “When the apostles were with Jesus, they **kept** asking him, ‘Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom?’”⁴ They repeatedly asked Him.

Sounds like little kids, doesn’t it? “Can I have a cookie, please, please, please?” “Can I get a pony, daddy?” “Can we have our country back?”

¹ Acts 1:1-11 (NLT2)

² Luke 24:50-51 (NLT)

³ Acts 1:9-11 (NLT)

⁴ Acts 1:6 (NLT)

Like their fellow countrymen, the disciples were looking for the deliverance of the people of Israel from foreign domination and for the establishment of an earthly kingdom. The reference to the coming of the Spirit had caused them to wonder if the new age was about to dawn.⁵

Here's the thing: they still thought Jesus was about political revolution. He is not. He is about spiritual revolution.

Instead, Jesus said in verse 7:

He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know."⁶

Jesus was telling them, "Look, that's not your concern. Leave God things to God. So, quit worrying about that stuff."

My friends, that's what I want to say to you as well: quit worrying about stuff. Stop worrying about the government. You may not like the current administration or the previous one. You think the Christians who were being martyred by the Roman Empire liked the government. No, but they didn't focus on it.

You worrying about the End Times? Don't. You and I are not to know when they are coming. Don't focus on it.

Jesus said:

He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. [Here's the key:] And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."⁷

The ninth key when you are hanging on in an upside-down world is to remember: **You are a living testimony.** Let's look again at verse 8: "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."⁸

The commissioning of the disciples is one of the few things that is recorded in each of the Gospels. Think about it:

- The Christmas story is only in Matthew and Luke, not Mark or John.
- "For God so loved the world...", the most famous passage of Scripture for the Christian, only in John.
- The Sermon on the Mount? Matthew 5-7 only.

Big time passages of Scripture, but not in every Gospel. But the commissioning of the disciples is in each of the 4 Gospels, plus Acts to boot.

Matthew 28:19-20 is generally called the Great Commission:

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.⁹

COMMENT

Acts 1:8 reads:

⁵ NIV Study Bible, Acts 1:6

⁶ Acts 1:7 (NLT2)

⁷ Acts 1:7-8 (NLT2)

⁸ Acts 1:8 (NLT)

⁹ Matthew 28:19-20a (NLT)

*But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*¹⁰

You are a living testimony. People will be looking at as you hang on in an upside down world. These are our marching orders when we feel like we are hanging on in an upside-down world.

So, stop worrying about the situation you are in. That's God's business. Start being a witness in the midst of your situation.

Do you remember at the cross as Jesus died? Listen to Matthew's account: *Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"*¹¹

Even in dying, Jesus was a witness.

Remember the story of Paul and Silas in Philippi:

*Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household.*¹²

Even though Paul was unjustly arrested, he sang praises to the Lord. That's being a witness in midst of your situation.

History knows them as the forty martyrs of Sebaste. They were soldiers in the famed Twelfth Legion of Rome's Imperial Army, around A.D. 320. One day, the captain informed his troops that Emperor Licinius had sent down an edict commanding all soldiers to offer a sacrifice to his pagan god. Forty of the soldiers were followers of Christ, and they refused. "You can have our armor and even our bodies, but our hearts' allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ," they said.

The emperor decided to make an example of the soldiers, so in the middle of winter, he marched them onto a frozen lake and stripped them of their clothes. "Renounce your God and you will be spared from death," he told them. Not one man came forward. So, he left them there, huddled together to contemplate his offer. Throughout the night the men stayed together, singing their song of victory: Forty Martyrs for Christ.

When morning came, thirty-nine of the men had frozen to death. The one survivor finally relented and crawled to safety, recanting his confession of faith in order to live. The officer in charge that night had been so moved by the scene that during his watch he'd come to Jesus, so he broke rank and walked out onto the ice. Stripping his clothes, he openly confessed his faith in Christ. The furious emperor demanded that he

¹⁰ Acts 1:8 (NLT)

¹¹ Matthew 27:54 (NRSV)

¹² Acts 16:25-32 (NLT2)

renounce Jesus, but he refused. When the ordeal was over, the Roman soldiers carried forty frozen men off of the ice.¹³

While you go through your situation, people are watching you, especially if you claim Christ as your Lord and Savior. Will your life and your reactions reflect what you purportedly believe? Will people see Jesus through you?

¹³ Lahaye, Tim, Jerry B. Jenkins and Frank M. Martin ed., *Embracing Eternity, Living Each Day With a Heart Toward Heaven: The Persecuted, Matthew 5:10- February 15*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. Downloaded from sermoncentral.com