

# Scheduling Problems

*Acts 1:6-14* | 5/28/2017

Love it or hate it, we live by our calendars.

There was a time when many of us carried them in our pockets, briefcases or purses. Paper calendars showed us when we had to be where. I still use one, since I like to see a whole month at a time.

Then came the digital revolution, and many of us traded in our leather-bound planners for PDAs, personal digital assistants. Then Steve Jobs and the people at Apple combined our PDAs, phones and MP3 players into smartphones. While we might have left our planners or PDAs at home on a Sunday morning, today most of us have our calendars with us even in worship. And yes, I use mine too.

Digital calendars can do things our paper calendars never could. They remind us of things we need to do based on our time and / or location. "Siri/Cortana/Alexa/Google, remind me when it is time to leave for my doctor's appointment." Then, based on your location and the traffic, your phone can tell you when it is time to leave.

Once we put an appointment into our phones, we never have to look at it again. We can simply wait for that little buzz to interrupt us, sometimes during worship, to remind us of what we need to attend to later in the day.

Truth is, we rely on our calendars to organize our lives. From the boardroom to the classroom, it is hard to get by without some idea of what will be happening -- and when. Digital, paper or in our heads, our calendars tend to drive large portions of our lives.

So imagine how the very first followers of Jesus must have felt about his answer when they asked about what was next. This is the nature of the conversation in Acts 1 -- today's text. Basically, Jesus is having a final debriefing before leaving on a trip -- a vertical and heavenly one. And, of course, they have questions.

"Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" the disciples asked (v. 6).

The question makes sense. They had been on an emotional roller coaster with Jesus in recent days. For three years, they followed him. They heard him talk frequently about a special time to come. He started his ministry telling them that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven was at hand. They listened as he told stories about banquets, mustard seeds and treasure buried in a field that he said were ways of describing this new reality to come.

They were with him when he entered Jerusalem several weeks earlier. They saw the crowd waving palm branches and shouting their praises. By riding a donkey into the city, Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy that announced God's rule and reign. It was a huge statement. Surely, they thought, this must be the time.

At the Last Supper, he seemed to confirm it. "I will not drink the fruit of the vine again until I drink it with you in my Father's kingdom." Next stop, the kingdom of God, they must have thought.

Instead of a coronation, however, there was a crucifixion. It appeared to be over. Their hopes were dashed. The dream of the restoration of the kingdom seemed to vanish. What now?

Then, as quickly as it was over, it was back on. Jesus is alive. Hope is not lost. Certainly, the kingdom must be coming. After 40 days of being with a post-resurrection Jesus during which he continued to teach them about God's kingdom, he calls a special meeting. Expectations must have been high. What was he going to do? What was he going to say? It had to be time for him to announce how the kingdom of God will come on earth as it is in heaven, just as he taught them to pray.

For the crowd that day, the tension is almost palpable. "Now? We want to get this on our calendars, so if not now, when?" They want to pencil in the kingdom day. They want to know which week they need to clear for this world-altering event. They want to know the deadline so they can be sure to be ready.

To these questions, Jesus gives a bewildering answer. "That's none of your concern." He actually says it more politely, but that's the gist of it. "Let me worry about the timing," he seems to say. "You just get to work on what you are supposed to do." Then he's gone. The disciples and the rest of the followers are left bewildered, staring into the sky.

The disciples have a scheduling problem, and for them, and for those of us who live by our calendars, Jesus' attitude can feel, well, frustrating.

+ It's hard to leave things in the hand of God;

- + Hard to let go and let God take care of details;
- + Hard to trust in divine providence to be faithful to promises made.

How are we to respond to this? It's not for me to know the "times and seasons"? Really?! How am I supposed to function with so little information?

The problem is that the kingdom of God doesn't fit into our calendars. Jesus doesn't give us a list of tasks we can put in our phones. Instead, he calls his followers to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And that includes us.

Our concern is to live into the mission of the church and the call of God today. It is not about getting ready for some later date. Our role is to be the people of God every day, and do what God wants us to do right now. We aren't cramming for a final exam. We aren't trying to meet a deadline before the Supervisor in the Sky calls us in for our performance review. This is a here-and-now, everyday issue.

Jesus calls his followers, both those on the hill that day and those in our pews today, to live for him at home, work and school, in our traveling, while running errands and wherever else life takes us. This includes our calendars and our schedules. It means, of course, penciling in time for worship, prayer, Bible study, performing random acts of charity, being faithful to your relationship responsibilities and being flexible enough to respond when God interrupts you, messes with your calendar and presents you with unexpected opportunities.

There's an old story about what happened when Jesus arrived back at the gates of heaven, following his ascension. All the heavenly hosts were gathered to celebrate his return home. They'd heard of his exploits on earth. They wanted to hear it straight from him.

Jesus described his adventures at great length: the preaching, the teaching, the healing. They laughed when he told them how he'd tied the Pharisees' theological arguments up in knots, and they wept when he described both the agony of the cross and the joy of resurrection.

Someone asked him, "Lord, now that you no longer physically walk the earth, who will share the good news?"

"I've got a plan," said Christ. "I've selected 11 followers, my closest friends. To them I've given the responsibility of sharing the good news." "They must have some incredible talents, those 11," remarked one angel.

"Well, actually no," the Lord responded. "These are average people, with ordinary abilities. They're vain and sometimes foolish. One of them, their leader, denied me three times."

"But, Lord," objected another angel, "how can you be sure they'll get the job done?"

"To be perfectly honest, I can't be sure."

"What do you mean, you can't be sure? What if they fail? What's your backup plan?"

Quietly Christ answered, "I have no backup plan."

We are Christ's only plan for sharing the good news of love, grace, salvation and eternal bliss. So let's "stay on message", doing what we are called to do now, and let God work out the schedule for the Second Coming. Let's just make sure that, like the saying goes, we're not so "heavenly minded" we're "no earthly good"!

*Pastor Keith*

## **Children's Sermon**

Bring to your conversation a paper calendar, perhaps one with pictures of your community. Bring your laptop and pull up the calendar page. See if anyone in the congregation has an iPad and/or PDA to bring forward to your gathering. Have them all pull up their calendar pages. Ask the children to take a look at all of these calendars. What are they for? We use calendars to write things we need to remember. Do they have calendars at their house? What are some things we would find on their calendars? Appointments with the doctor or dentist? Soccer games? Team practices? Church meetings? Show them some Post-it notes. Why do we use these? We use these to help us to remember something important. What are some things that are important that we might not have on our schedule? Possible answers might be to sit with a schoolmate who's crying because someone said something mean. Maybe it's to help mom when she's really busy. Maybe it's to make our bed in the morning without being told. Sometimes, the most important things we do as people who follow Jesus are things that are not planned and not on our schedules. Being ready for interruptions is a part of what it means to follow Jesus. Give each child a Post-it note and ask them to take the note home and write on it a kind thing they can do for someone else in the week ahead.