

2. Christ's Mission

[Acts 1:1-11](#)

National's Mission

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Sunday, September 22, 2002

[Real Audio \(2 MB\)](#)

There is a word missing in today's Scripture lesson. The original Greek text contains the word *airxato*. It means began, and it does appear in earlier English translations. Here, for example, is the Revised Standard Version: In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up. The implication is that Jesus has not finished what he is doing and teaching. Luke's first letter to Theophilus (we now call it The Gospel of Luke) lays out what Jesus began to do and teach during his earthly ministry. Luke's second letter (we now call it The Acts of the Apostles) lays out what the risen Jesus is continuing to do and teach through the church.

In other words, there is a clear continuity between Christ's mission and the church's mission. What Jesus did we are to do. What Jesus taught we are to teach.

Some of you are deeply concerned about continuity here at National Presbyterian, and understandably so. You have lost two highly respected pastors within weeks of one another, and you wonder whether things will ever be the same. The only honest answer is yes and no. No because no two pastors are alike. Your future pastors will not be Craig's clone or Jeff's twin. Then things won't be the same? Yes they will, so long as this church does what Jesus did and teaches what Jesus taught.

It was said of Jesus, He was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people (Luke 24:19). Deed and word are the two tracks on which the National Presbyterian Limited must travel in order to keep from derailing. And so far as I can tell, you are keeping your balance very well. On the word track you are teaching the Scriptures to children and youth, and you are providing a score of adult study opportunities. On the deed track you are sharing Christ's love through deacons and Stephen Ministers, through mission work in Bir Zeit on the West Bank and the Third Street Church of God in D.C., by helping neighbors in need through the new Caring Teams, and in a host of other ways, many of them quiet and hidden. Keep a healthy balance between word and deed and you need never fear that National's Express will fall off the tracks on one side or the other. Teach what Jesus taught and do what Jesus did, and you will maintain a clear continuity, not only with your former pastors but more importantly with Jesus himself.

There is also a word of caution in this text. The disciples are curious about God's kingdom. Lord, they asked, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel? Today people are asking similar questions: When will Jesus return? What are the signs for the Second Coming? Are we living in the last days?

Now, curiosity is one of God's good gifts, and it's understandable that we who live under the threat of annihilation should be curious about God's kingdom. And, of course, some are only too happy to address our curiosity. I was in a Christian bookstore one day, and as I waited my turn at the checkout counter I glanced at the nearby display case featuring books on Biblical prophecy. There were no fewer than seventy different titles, all purporting to satisfy our curiosity about the second coming of Christ.

But Jesus cautions us: It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. Nor was this the first time Jesus poured cold water on their curiosity. Shortly before his death Jesus said, About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Matthew 24:36)

I wish I had heard that caution back in high school. Sensing a call to ministry, I had been saving money for college as the first step toward ordination. But one night I heard a prominent evangelist on the radio

predict that Jesus would return within the next five years. Well, I had one year left in high school and then four years in college: five years! So I said to myself, What's the use of spending all that money and time preparing for a ministry I will never get to perform? Believe it or not, I spent most of my savings. I bought chrome hubcaps for my car, I took my girl friend out to dinner, I treated my friends at the Dairy Queen. Eventually I came to my senses, but not before my savings were severely depleted.

Thankfully that was not the end of the story. I got a job as a groundskeeper on a large estate in Santa Barbara, intending to work for a year and then go to college. In late August, one week before the start of the fall term, the owner called me into her home and said, Tom, I understand you want to be a minister. I have helped educate doctors, attorneys, and many others, but I've never had the privilege of helping a young man become a minister, whereupon she handed me a check for \$500. In terms of today's tuition that doesn't sound like much, does it? But that was fifty-one years ago. Today that \$500 would be equal to at least \$5,000. The next day I drove to Los Angeles, applied for entrance, was accepted, and within a week I was taking my first college classes, preparing for a ministry I've been doing for forty-three years.

If Christ returns today or tomorrow to establish God's kingdom, thank God! But don't waste your time trying to outguess your Savior. Jesus didn't know the date of his return, so what right have we to speculate?

Instead, let us consent to our Lord's commission to get on with his ministry: It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Just as we were called to worship in this sanctuary, Christ commissions us to witness in that world. If the District of Columbia is our Jerusalem, then the surrounding cities are Judea. And where is Samaria? In Jesus' day no self-respecting Jew would ever drive through Samaria. People went out of their way, they took the Jordan Beltway to avoid Samaria. So the question is where are we reluctant to go? Around which parts of town do we take a wide detour? That's our Samaria. And that's where Jesus is sending us to witness.

And he sends us to the world. Not just the geographical world -- Africa, Asia, South America -- but the suffering world, the world of HIV/AIDS, the world of homeless children, the world of abused women, the world of displaced persons and refugees, the hurting world, the wounded world, the world Jesus loves, the world for which Jesus died, the world over which Jesus weeps.

Note that I'm using plural pronouns. Jesus commissions us, Jesus sends National Presbyterian Church to this hurting, hungry world. You personally may not be equipped to resettle the homeless, but someone else is, and that someone will represent us in Christ's mission to the destitute. You personally may not be gifted to counsel abused women, but someone else is, and that someone will be National Presbyterian's missionary to victims of violence.

Make no mistake: we as a church are to continue Christ's mission. Or, more accurately, Christ continues his mission through us. And when the two men in white robes asked, Why do you stand looking up toward heaven? what they meant was, Don't waste your time trying to decipher God's confidential calendar. There's ministry to be done here on earth, and it's time to get on with it!