Text: Acts 1:1-11

**Introduction**

If you ever decide you want to sit down and figure out the dates of biblical events on our Gregorian calendar system, you eventually run into some pure choices. The bible, as almost every ancient document that you would use, fixes time in relation to major events. Roman events would be recorded ab urbe condita – from the founding of the city. Or alternately as Luke would reference in his first book, “in the 50th year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar…”. That is when John the Baptist began calling out in the wilderness. Most ancient events would be keyed like that. “In the year King Uzziah died…”. That is when Isaiah’s prophetic call came.

Now you might think that wouldn’t be so hard. And there are just enough date signals through the bible and in other ancient works that some fixed events can be established, like 753 BC would be the founding of the city. Rome being The City. But you inevitability hit the question, when does a reign start? Does a reign start immediately upon the death of the old monarch? Does a reign start upon the Ascension to the throne? Or does the reign start at the coronation? Would the second Elizabethan age end in 2022 or in 2023? Would the third Carolingian begin in 2022 or 2023? You will have to answer questions like that for cultures Egyptian, Persian, Neo-Babylonian, Assyrian, Israeli, Judean and others. And different cultures had different dating customs. Some long lived ones – if a monarch lasts past a diamond jubilee say, or have a revolution and a restoration – might even forget how it was done and change something. To put a date on events, you will have to decide and move on.

If in a fit of madness such a task ever overtakes you, Bishop Ussher has already done all the hard work. You can pick up his roughly 1000 page tome – the Annals of the World.

For our purposes this morning, we will just accept some of the mystery. That some things start early, await for their anointing, and still long for full recognition.

**The Beginning of the Kingdom**

Luke, like the good Bishop, is something of a meticulous man. And in his first book, that is what we call the gospel according to Luke, he “tells of all that Jesus began to do and teach until he was taken up.” How Jesus “presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the Kingdom of God.”

Does this Kingdom of God begin in its fullness at the Ascension? Does it await the anointing of the Holy Spirit? Or does it still long for full recognition?

The testimony of Scripture – captured in the creed as “ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.” – is that the Kingdom of God has come in its fullness now. That fullness defined as all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ. In our text for today Luke tells us of this ascension and coronation through the eyes of the apostles on earth. Which is rather short, “while they were looking on he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” If you want the rest you would have to read Revelation chapters 4 and 5. The elders and the four living creatures and all heaven asking who is worthy to open the scroll and read the proclamation and weeping because no one worthy is found. And just then a lamb appears who takes that scroll and the throne on the right. And the prophet hears “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, say ‘to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.’” As of Ascension Day, the Kingdom has come in its fullness.

So why does it not feel like it?

**The Proclamation we Want**

I think the answer comes down to the difference between the Kingly decrees we want to hear, and the decrees that we have been given.

What do we want to hear?

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

If we are going to have a King, we want a right proper one. One with full evident power and authority. And one that has the full glory of a regal court. A court that would include me.

What is the purpose of siting at the right hand of God with everything under your feet if you aren’t going to share some of that power and authority with your peeps? Restore the Kingdom to Israel. That’s the decree we want. And maybe you are a much nicer person than I am, would be a much more graceful Lord or Lady. But if such authority was vested in me now, I’m pretty sure I’d be following the advice of the world and consolidating power and making conscription lists of all the bad people. Forget leaving the wheat and weeds to grow until harvest. Send the reapers out now. Forget giving the mustard seed a season to grow, I’m harvesting blood now.

The Kingdom has certainly come to Israel, but not the Kingdom of Power. Instead what will come – has come – is the Kingdom of the Spirit, which has a power all its own.

**The Proclamation We Have Been Given**

This is the first part of the decree that we have been given. “Wait for the promise of the Father. You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” For these apostles that comes 10 days hence – 7 since we are observing Ascension on Sunday – on Pentecost. The first part of the royal decree is that all Israel shall be anointed. The same way that Jesus was anointed at his baptism and he was enabled to carry out his mission in the power of the Spirit; we too have been anointed to carry out the mission of the Kingdom in this age.

And the mission of the Kingdom in this age is not separating the wheat from the chaff. The mission is not firmly establishing its rule from coast to coast. The mission is not forcing every knee to bow and tongue to confess. Remember, according to the vision from heaven, this is already a reality. Your God reigns. The lamb is upon the throne. Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, already offers praise.

The mission of the Kingdom in this age is enable and prepare hearts to offer that praise with joy.

That notice in Revelation of every creature includes those under the earth. It includes all that is in heave and earth. Which would include Satan and his demons. They know. They have been defeated. They offer the praise. But the coronation of the Lord for them is not the day of joy.

The mission of the Kingdom in this age is to enable and prepare hearts such that they are joyful, not full of fear and dread.

The decree that we have been given is “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” We do not know the length of time of this mission, but we do know the mission. The time is not for us to know. The Father has fixed it by his own authority. But we have been given the power to witness to the hope – to the joy – that lives within us.

**How We Are to Carry in Out**

We might here ask how? How have we been given this power? Israel – the people of God – seem to be chased from place to place in every age.

I’m going to steal from Mathew’s Ascension Day scene the how. The same Royal decree is given. “Make disciples of all nations.” Be those witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. And if the world is chasing you somewhere else, it might just be chasing you to fruitful soil. But Mathew’s Jesus continues. How do we make disciples?

Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Baptizing and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

The mission of the Kingdom in this age is the keep the faith to live it as witnesses before the world. To baptize such that the promise of the Father gifts his people. To teach such that we might have oil in our lamps when the bridegroom returns. To teach such that we might understand the joy which has been given to us by the grace of the Father.

That the is the mission of the Kingdom now. It is a Kingdom whose full power is hidden under water. Under bread and wine. It is Kingdom that limits its power to the Word today. Even more-so, to the Word relayed by representatives like us. Relayed in what we teach and in the lives we live empowered by the Holy Spirit. Today, it is a Kingdom of Faith.

**The Kingdom of Power Does Come**

Tomorrow, “this Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go.” Tomorrow, the Kingdom comes in full power and glory.

Does this Kingdom of God begin in its fullness at the Ascension? Absolutely. Everything has been placed under Christ’s feet.

Does it await the anointing of the Holy Spirit? This is how that Kingdom comes to us. In Word and Sacrament.

Does it still long for full recognition? Some days too much. Come soon.

Dating the beginnings of reigns can be tough. But we don’t need to do it again. This King reigns forever and ever. Amen.