

COMMENTARY - ACTS - Willimon

William H. Willimon. INTERPRETATION, A Biblical Commentary on ACTS (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988),

Acts 1: 1-14 Waiting and Praying for Restoration

You shall receive power to be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth (1:8). ... For Luke, as for Paul, "the form of this world is passing away (I Cor. 7:31). Since Christ, all previously existing relationships of power are being transformed. It is not simply that the world is expected to end soon but that the world view as it had been, the methods and values for determining worth and significance in the world, has ended. There is now a new reality. For Luke, that new reality involved the vision of a Jesus who is raised to rule with the Creator of the universe. Death, the ultimate "ending" - the master fact which determines most of our horizons, our values, our projects - has been ended in the resurrection of Christ. Luke's "history" is the story of that new reality which has turned the world upside down, relativized all existing relationships, and enabled believers to live as people "between the times" - between the end of an old age held by the powers of death and evil and a new age where the future is still to be fully realized, still open-ended to the movements of the Spirit.¹

For disciples, what they know of what has happened in the resurrection is the source of their hope but also of their yearning. They want Christ to fulfill his promise of restoration, to finish the work begun. When? they ask. As the recipients of their Lord's instruction and as witness to his death and resurrection, they know that the decisive battle has been fought and won - but not yet. Now, in the meantime, they wait as those who are still dependent upon the Father's faithfulness, those who have no control over the timetable of a beneficent God

¹ William H. Willimon. INTERPRETATION, A Biblical Commentary on ACTS (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 19.

who graciously allows enough time to accomplish the work begun in Jesus. This time between ascension and Pentecost was once designated by Karl Barth as a "significant pause" between the mighty acts of God, a pause in which the church's task is to wait and to pray.... in a time of expectant waiting for the Spirit.

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But their waiting is not empty-handed. They wait in hope, as those who know that their Master has been "taken up" (1:2) where he is exalted at the right hand of God" (2:33). After the ascension, when Christians speak of God they must also speak of Christ, for Christ now reigns with God. The follower of Christ know that the one who served, taught, and loved them now rules for them. This knowledge demands witness. Thus, they are given a job to do and will have power with which to do it. The time between Easter and the restoration of the kingdom is the gracious interim for witness.³

Acts 1:15-26 Leadership in the Community

The community which gathers to wait and to pray is an unusual one - a fact attested by Luke's parenthetical mention in 1:14 of women who had been with Jesus since Galilee (Luke 8:2; 23:49, 55; 24: 10-11) and of Jesus' mother and brothers. The inclusion of women in the roster of the community would not have been missed by a second-century reader, as an indication that already we have a group which breaks barriers.⁴

2: 44-45 (4:32) All things in common

Acts 4:33-35:

² William H. Willimon. INTERPRETATION, A Biblical Commentary on ACTS (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 20.

³ William H. Willimon. INTERPRETATION, A Biblical Commentary on ACTS (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 20.

⁴ William H. Willimon. INTERPRETATION, A Biblical Commentary on ACTS (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 22

Acts 20: 35

In his farewell speech at the Last Supper, Jesus contrasted the leaders “of the Gentiles” with leadership among disciples (Luke 22:25-27). In the company of the disciples, the leader is “one who serves,” not one who seeks privilege, power, and authority. Paul makes a similar point in discussing leadership and the love of money by noting that when it comes to evaluating the church’s leaders, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (20:35). There is a marked difference between the way the world judges leadership and the way leadership is sought in the church. Despite the suffering it brought to him, and who now heads toward Jerusalem for his final journey felt that he had reason for boldness. The elders [leadership] in their feeding, care, and vigilance for their flock do well to follow Paul’s example.⁵ Willimon’s final comment is that Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders would be a fine text for an ordination sermon or for a reconstruction of our theologies of ordination. In its interplay between the *action* and the *being* of church leaders, its focus upon the *duties* of the elders for the support, care, and protection of the flock, in its frank admission of the *possibilities for pain* within the Christian ministry it provides us with a model (as Paul himself was a model) for thinking about Christian ministry.⁶

⁵ William H. Willimon. INTERPRETATION, A Biblical Commentary on ACTS (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 157.

⁶ William H. Willimon. INTERPRETATION, A Biblical Commentary on ACTS (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 158.