



Pastor's Report 2021-2022 Nall Avenue Church of the Nazarene

I've never had to write a final, *final* Pastor's report before. It has proven to be difficult! But I got a little help from the lectionary and the Christian calendar this week in the form of ascension. You see, it seems that Jesus had to give a final Pastor's report too, and it has given me some helpful guidelines. This is what Jesus said in his final report:

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 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." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6–11, NRSV)

The first thing I find in this text that is helpful for our situation is that, as we enter into the unknown future, we don't have to know what's next because *the Father knows*. 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom...?' The disciples wanted to *know* - What's next? What's going to happen now? And Jesus said, 'It's not for you to know...the Father knows.' I think the same is true for all of us today. 'Who's going to be the next pastor?' 'Is it going to be a good fit?' 'How long will we have to wait?' And Jesus says, 'It is not for you to know...the Father knows.' God, our loving, wise Heavenly Father, has it all worked out, and all we need do is pray and trust and wait. Waiting is hard, but its easier if you have something to do to pass the time.

The second thing I see in this Ascension Sendoff story that is helpful for us is that we still have work to do. Jesus said, 'You will be my witnesses...', and the Angel said, 'Why do you stand here looking up toward heaven?' They are both implying the same thing, 'Why are you just standing around? We've got work to do!' When I was growing up, my home church had two rather long interim periods where we were without a pastor. During those times, our church had interim pastors who came in and preached well and loved us and gave good advice and encouragement, but obviously an interim pastor isn't able to be around as much as a full-time pastor. So the congregation realized that if the work of the church was to be done, they would have to do it. In both of those interim periods, our church flourished and grew. It was an exciting time of expectation, but it was also a time where the lay people shouldered the burdens and ministries of the church and really thrived in the process. As is almost always the case, many of those who were involved during the interim went back to their role as spectators when the new pastors arrived and in both cases, our church lost some momentum even with the arrival of a new pastor. Why do we do that? I've seen it in other places too. I think you all have done an outstanding job of embracing one of our key verses over the last eight years. We have spoken much of Ephesians 4:11-12: *'The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry'*, and you have embraced these verses and listened hard to God's call on your life. Many of you have simply continued in the service/ministry in which you've always been engaged. Many of you have found new ways to do the work of the Kingdom. It has been exciting to see you all, the Saints (ἅγιος - hagios - 'holy ones' or 'called out ones' or 'set apart

ones'), doing the work of the ministry. You are well equipped, not only for this interim period of transition, but you are ready to continue the work of the ministry and give your new pastor the boost and support they need when they arrive. Keep up the good work!

It has been my great honor and privilege to be your pastor for the last eight years. We have all grown together, we've cried and laughed and eaten and worked together and God has richly blessed us. It is hard to leave. I know it was hard for Jesus to leave his disciples. But I know he left *knowing* - *knowing* that it was the right time, *knowing* the Father had the next step covered and *knowing* that his disciples were *ready*. I know all of those things as well - God's leading for us has been clear - right time, right opportunity. I know God has you all covered for the next stage of your journey. And I KNOW you are ready - and I can't wait to see where Our Father takes Nall Avenue Church of the Nazarene next. It's going to be great!

Well, what are you waiting for? Time to get to work!

May the Spirit Inspire and Empower you,

Steve Johnson