

## Seventh Sunday of Easter May 12, 2024

The Feast of the Ascension of Jesus was Thursday. The author of Luke/Acts tells of the end of Jesus' time on earth with his disciples. The command to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, this powerful Advocate/presence from God. One that would guide them in their task to be Jesus' witnesses in their hometowns, their region, other countries, and finally the whole world.

Then it describes how he withdrew from them and was carried into heaven. The disciples then go with joy back to Jerusalem to wait for this promised Holy Spirit.

We know that Spirit will not come for another week. Ten days from when Jesus had left them with a blessing. But they didn't know that. All they knew was they were to wait. So, there they sat, in this strange in-between time. Between what was and what will be. Knowing the presence of Jesus and waiting to fulfill his final charge to them to witness to him. I wonder what they thought about, talked about, dreamed about during that time?

We know something about living in in-between times, don't we. High school seniors who have been working so hard, almost frantically to finish class projects, final concerts, exams. And now that those are done... sit in this in-between moment of being done, but not yet graduated. In this weird knowledge that everything they knew in the last 12 years is over and the next adventure- of college, or career- lies just ahead. But not yet.

We know about living in in-between times. When we know we're leaving this job, we've had the interview, and we wait for the response. Knowing

this job, this moment in our life is done one way or the other. Waiting to learn what the next part will bring.

We know about living, in in-between times.

We sit on this seventh Sunday of Easter with the disciples in this in-between moment. Their time with Jesus in the flesh finally over. Pondering who he is, what he means to them. But also knowing that once this power of God falls on them, they will go out into the world and boldly proclaim how much God has done for them through Jesus.

We, too, have celebrated with joy the resurrection of Jesus. The promise and hope that comes to us through that resurrection. We, too, wait. Wait for Pentecost and the promised Holy Spirit, that we might be empowered to go out and to be witnesses. To tell our story of what God's love come to us in Jesus has meant for us and our lives.

What do we ponder, with the disciples this week? In this in-between time. Perhaps it is to look back at how Jesus has touched our lives. Where he has bathed us in God's love for us. By healing our wounds. By chasing out our demons. By looking us in the eye, calling us beloved, and saying- "I choose you, come and follow me." Can you picture those moments in your life?

We ponder as we look around at this community of believers Jesus has called us into. I had one of my students this week ask a question about the importance of our personal faith in God. As Martin Luther said, one of the most powerful things is the fact that God is for me. For each of us, individually. Yet, the love of God comes to us not to save us, alone, but to save the world. The love of God that is Jesus comes to call us into deeper

and more loving community. It is about the ya'll, of which we each are a part.

As with those first disciples, this assembly of believers is not perfect. We mess up. Misunderstand. We have our squabbles. Display our quirks. Don't always live up to Jesus' expectations for us. His example to us. Maybe this is why I like Mark's gospel so much. Because the original twelve are the same. Yet, Jesus doesn't send them away.

But ultimately, because we have all experienced that same love of God come to us in Jesus. Because through his teaching we have begun to see in each other the same diversity of gifts and abilities that he did. And how those gifts fit together into a whole that is greater than the sum of their parts. Ultimately, we find in this messy, imperfect, wonderful community of faith, life. Life that truly is life. A life better than one we could find without this community of followers of Jesus.

As with those first disciples, in this in-between time, we ponder our relationship with the world. The love of God that was poured out over us in baptism has ruined us. For while we are in the world, we don't belong there. Because we have experienced the power of the way of love, of peace, of hope. And that makes us...different.

I was listening to an Israeli professor speak about the coming invasion of Rafah, and in his statement about that attempt to finish Hamas as an organization, he said something to the effect of, "We must kill our enemies, that is the only game in town." But we know different, don't we.

That the only thing that will conquer fear and hate is love. That violence and bloodshed ultimately never solves anything. You cannot kill fear and

hate. It just feeds them. Those things can only be smothered out by love. Transformed by love. That is really the only game in town. Jesus has, indeed, ruined us for the ways of the world.

We sit in this in-between time. The program year over, a different pattern of worship coming up, a differently paced time of ministry. Looking back and giving thanks for what has been. Looking ahead and pondering what God is calling us to in that future. Resting. Pondering. Waiting. For the Holy Spirit to fall upon us and pull us back out into the world.

And until that time, we are those who delight in the word of the Lord. We meditate on God's teaching in Jesus day and night. We are like trees planted by streams of water. The healing water of baptism that claims and cleanses, the refreshing waters of communion- bread and wine that feeds our bodies and souls, the nourishing waters of the Word of God come to us in Jesus and in the scriptures. Waters that make us grow straight and tall.

And when we are connected to this True Vine of Jesus- we bear good fruit in due season. The fruit of God's love, that we receive and that we spread to others.

For our graduating seniors and others who are in these major in-between times- I pray that you would feel the presence of God with you in these moments. Would find the time to truly ponder what has been and what is to come. So that when the time is complete- you going forth on the next adventure would be filled with joy. Anticipation. Hope. Promise.

For the rest of us in this in-between time. I pray that we might find rest and inspiration.

So that when that Holy Spirit comes, we would be ready to answer the call and follow Jesus into this world that God so loved, because God in Jesus has already loved us into life.

We are in an in-between time. But we are together. We are beloved of God. And what more could we need.

Thanks be to God!