

## Seventh Sunday of Easter/Ascension Sunday, May 24, 2020<sup>1</sup>

O king of Glory, we worship and exalt you and thank you for sending us the Advocate to help us especially during this difficult time. AMEN

What must these disciples have been feeling as they watched their Lord leave them and disappear into the heavens? A terrible sense of loss. They had such a short time together – three years. It makes me think about the feelings I have had and I bet you have had when it became clear we couldn't be together in person for an undetermined period of time because of the virus. At least we know it will be over; we just don't know when; they knew it was forever. However, Jesus did promise them he would send the Advocate/the Holy Spirit to give them power to do the work they had to do. And major work it was, too; to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:6-14

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

We celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit next week in the Feast of Pentecost.

Koinonia is a wonderful Greek word and one of the few I know. It describes the fellowship we have as Christians. To be together, to share in each other's lives, to celebrate, to commiserate, to help in times of trouble and rejoice in times of great joy. I imagine the disciples were a very close-knit group and this departure of Jesus would feel like a huge loss; like the one we have felt over the past three months. Thanks to the leadership of our priest and vestry and the willingness of many of you to keep our koinonia going, we have not felt as bereft as we might have felt. This is a further indication of our closeness and love for one another that we have as a congregation. How blessed we are to have one another.

Why did Jesus have to leave the disciples and followers and go back to God? Wouldn't it have been better if he stayed and taught everyone what he wanted them to do and how to do it? The first answer comes from Jesus himself. He told us he had to go and prepare a place for us so that we would be together forever with Him. He wasn't leaving us without any resources to help us to do

what he wanted us to do. He made it clear he was sending us the Holy Spirit. We also have the comfort of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist. We know how comforting it is to take part in the Eucharist every Sunday. We especially know this now during these past several weeks when we have voluntarily given up the physical partaking of the Body and Blood of our beloved Savior for our safety and the safety of others.

Another outcome of Jesus' return to his father is how the disciples and the church learned to lean on each other for help and a deeper understanding of our mission – to tell the world about Him. Jesus lives, and because he lives, so will we also live. Of course, Jesus had to go back to his home. His mission on earth was completed. It is our job to complete his ongoing earthly mission. We have learned through prayer and worship to maintain contact with him and learn of his great love for us. We are not alone.

Peter tells us in his Epistle “when life gets really difficult, don't jump to conclusions that God isn't on the job.” When you read this or heard this this morning, did you immediately think about what we are going through now? I did. Peter says we are in the thick of what

Christ experienced. It is a spiritual refining process. How are we being refined? This raises the question of what are we learning from it? How are we being spiritually refined? We learned as we are instructed, to cast all our anxieties on God, because he cares for us. This is one of my favorite verses in Scripture. It doesn't say to cast some of our anxieties on Him or cast on COVID19 anxieties on him. It says to cast ALL our anxieties on him. Why? Because he cares for us. What a remarkable promise. We are to discipline ourselves, too e.g. stay home, wear masks, stay 6 feet apart, those strictures which prevent the spread of the virus. For a lot of us this is a hard discipline but one that is well worth it.

We are to keep alert, stay steadfast in our faith, and understand that we are not alone in this suffering. I think of missionaries who are going through this in remote places and without adequate medical care or food. I think of people in the United States and other places who don't have clothes, housing, food, educational opportunities and are without income. How can we help them? It might not be a good idea to go out in the midst of this pandemic but we can contribute to Family Promise, Food Banks, the Salvation Army and

Episcopal Relief and Development. We give these gifts not only as an act of charity but also in thanksgiving for God's gifts to us. This is a time for sacrificial giving above and beyond our usual support. If you take anything home from this sermon, let it be your Deacon's pleading with you to give to those in need to a greater extent than you thought possible. The need is greater than we thought possible in this country, one of the wealthiest in the world. It's hard to imagine such need but it is right in front of us.

One season of the church draws to a close; for many of us it is a favorite season characterized by the beauty of the resurrection of the Son of God and the beauty of creation. We now recognize how his eternal life and our eternal life are tied together. The ascension story ties together the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and the expectation that our earthly ministry will pick up where his earthly ministry ended.

Of course, he also promised to send us the Holy Spirit who will be our helper in our earth-based ministry. We see in next week's service where that happens. Stepping back from these events gives

us a chance to see God's plan in all its magnificence and beauty.

How blessed we are by all that has been given us.

My prayer is that we use our gifts to God's glory and to fill our lives with eternal meaning and holiness.

AMEN

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