

## Reflection for May 5, 2024 – A Friend at My Side

### Inspired by Acts 1:1-11

This story in Acts is an interesting one indeed. The apostles had been following a resurrected Jesus for 40 days. Now this Jesus is preparing them for his final departure.

Jesus had spoken about the coming of a new Kingdom and so it is logical that his followers would ask, as Brenda read for us, **“Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?”** Jesus responds with, **“You don’t get to know the time. Timing is the Father’s business.”**

Many Christians take this to mean that God will decide when Jesus will return. When he does return, a number of possibilities are envisioned. There are judgement predictions, as well as saving and healing predictions.

This “Second Coming” of Christ in fact polarizes Christians all over the world. Some believe that only by acting in specific ways and following strict religious doctrine, that their souls will be saved. Others don’t see God as being judgmental, and so have a more liberal outlook to their faith.

The Parousia, the second coming, has been and continues to be a divisive topic in churches and faith expressions. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

**Suddenly two men appeared—in white robes! They said, “You Galileans! —why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left.”**

Why in fact do we glance heavenward expecting a miracle? What are we waiting for? If we are waiting for God to bring justice and healing to the earth in Jesus’ return, what is the delay? I know I would be blacklisted from any number of denominations for speaking so boldly, but what is God waiting for? If ever there was a time for God to bring humanity to its senses, it would be now. So come Holy One, come Creator, send Jesus back to teach us more, and remind us of whose we are and how we are to behave.

I was reading an article the other day titled, Ascension? Not in Celtic Theology.

You might recall that last year part of my sabbatical was experiencing that tradition. Celtic theology is a belief that God is seen as intrinsic within all of creation, both animate and inanimate. The Celts have an affinity for all the goodness we see before us every day. The earth, sky, stars, water, rocks plants, animals and all of humanity are sacred and are precious gifts from God.

This particular article by Ivan Gregan says this, **“The concept of an ascending Jesus, of him being far away, above and beyond, was ridiculous to the Celts. He simply withdrew and trusts us to continue the work, just as any parent would do when they believe their child has been instructed enough to carry on the work. Yet, as every watchful parent does, he abides in the shadows keeping watch on his own.”**<sup>1</sup>

This theology makes Jesus eminently near and ever available for consultation to every person and is the reason he is often referred to in Celtic Poetry as “a friend at my side.”<sup>2</sup>

The vision of a mother or father, a grandparent, a trusted friend or a good confidant, “a friend at my side” is an image I am comforted by.

Jesus being with me when our daughters were in hospital awaiting surgery. Jesus with me, somehow calming me and encouraging a positive presence, when I was treated for a heart attack.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ivan Gregan, Gathering, Resources for Worship Planners, Pentecost 2, 2021, Year B, p. 84

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 84

Jesus with me the first day I attended the Centre for Christian Studies and panicked. Jesus with me in this ministry when I have doubted if I could fulfill your needs. Jesus with me and the family of the mother who slipped away from this life, as we were gathered by her bedside. Jesus with me as a father when I have been needed to listen, hold or hug and to dry away tears.

Jesus, God's emissary walks with us every day. Yes, he has withdrawn, but he is on the sidelines. He is always there coaching and inspiring, giving feedback and advice.

A very good friend of mine passed away suddenly last week. It was a real shock and so tragic as he was my age and extremely fit. I was very fond of him. Richard was my former boss when I worked for Health Canada. And he was one of those bosses you would do anything for.

A couple of nights ago I had a dream about my old job and Richard was in it. Not surprising. Of course, the dream made little sense, but as often is the case when a person awakes, there are some interesting memories of the past and they are often very touching if not inspiring.

Do you recall the special someone's in your life that have passed? Do they come to you in dreams or visions at times? They may bring tears, but they also bring comfort and amazing happy memories, people who leave us here on earth are never really gone and they can inspire us yet.

Jesus acts in the same way. Coming to us in worship, through Hymn or prayer. Providing assurance when needed. Reminding us of hope when there seems to be none around. He holds our hands when we weep, drying our tears with the sleeve of his robe. He gives us that little nudge to move on when our feet feel like lead.

The very Jesus who Luke says disappeared in a cloud is here in this place with us now. He is also with our friends online, sitting next to them as they join us in worship. He will be there during our hospitality after worship and with you on the way home today. He will be next to you during your gardening this afternoon or along side you during your walk or Sunday afternoon drive.

Luke suggests Jesus will return as mysteriously as when he left. I don't believe he ever did leave. The mystery for me is why more people can't see that.

Let Jesus be a constant companion in your journey through life. Believe that his presence is not somewhere way off in another age. Believe that the love he shared with everyone is yours and that the hope he had for peace and justice remains alive. **Believe that Jesus is a friend at your side.**

Thanks for listening this morning, Amen