

“Welcoming the Spirit of the Living God”

Luke 24: 44-53 and Acts 1:1-11

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From the moment he started his ministry, one thing I learned about Jesus of Nazareth is that he loves surprises. Not that he loves someone give him surprise, like I do. But that he loves give people around him surprises. Healing someone at the time they didn't expect, for example, we heard ton of tons of that kind of story, he also did raise someone from the death, that we also know he likes to do in unexpected situation, one of that story is when he raise Lazarus after he was dead for four days already! Can you imagine? For me that is surprising and weird, in someways.

He also continues his surprise, especially to the disciples, by “looks helpless” in the moment when the soldiers arrest him, he didn't even fight back. That must be confusing and surprising at the same time for the disciples. How come The Messiah, The Anointed One, The King of Kings is being arrested and at the end literally dies on the cross? Wasn't it crazy surprise for them who expecting him to reign and defeat all the power of Roman Empire, on that time? Jesus then continues his surprise by disappear from the tomb, three days after he died. The women are shocked and surprise that they didn't saw the body of Jesus, but instead found an angel.

And finally, today we remembered forty days after he resurrected, when Jesus, again, surprise his disciples by ascending, float all the way up into the sky, just like a helium balloon. The disciples were left open-mouthed, staring into the sky and wondering where he goes, when He would return, why he left them again, and so many other questions that they might haven't got a chance to ask him.

The disciples left even without them saying good bye to the teacher, for a second time. It sounds like an irony, isn't it? They didn't get a chance to say goodbye before Jesus was arrested at the first place. And it still fresh in their memory I believe, how confused and broken-hearted they were when the soldier took Jesus when they were in Gethsemane. And this time, for a second time Jesus didn't give them a chance to hug, kiss-on-the-cheek, or simple handshake as a "ritual" of saying goodbye to the loved ones.

Well, most of us know and have said good byes in our life and none of them were easy. Something deep down in us resists the move from presence to absence. When someone is present to us, our space is filled, we are not alone. There is conversation, togetherness, and communion. And when someone leaves us, especially those who are close to us and have an impact in our life, there is a time of crisis. The absence of a person who is usually around us most of the times puts us in the moment of loneliness.

In our reading today, we see that after Jesus had consoled the Apostles by appearing to them at different times during the forty-days period, and by wishing them peace, He declared at last that He was about to leave this world and ascend to heaven to prepare a place for them.

In this moment what is important is not only what happens at the moment, where Jesus one more time shows his divinity, by floating all the way up and disappearing behind the clouds, but also the promise he gave, which is also super important. He promised to send them the Divine Spirit, the Spirit of Strength and Wisdom.

"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.”
(Acts 1:8-9).

I personally really love these two verses. There is a promise, there is a responsibility, and there is a magical moment. And that for me, defines Christianity in simple terms. Promise, responsibility, and magical moment or perhaps I could say surprise. The surprise part, might be enticing but at the same time filled us with scaredness. Just as what the disciple felt on that time.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, the moment of Jesus' ascension is very critical. I don't know why it seems like it being under covered in some way. I mean, compared to Christmas, Easter, and even Pentecost. Not many people know and put their attention to this liturgical day.

Timothy Keller or Tim Keller argues forcefully that the ascension is a crucial, if often overlooked, aspect of the work of Christ. Keller writes. *“The ascension becomes an irreplaceable, important resource for living our lives in the world—and it's a resource no other religion or philosophy of life holds out to us.”* He also really helpful, for me particularly, to see ascension differently by his argument that, *“Jesus' ascension doesn't mean the loss of his intimacy, leadership and advocacy; it means the magnification and availability of them all.”*

Before he ascended, Jesus said to the disciples that the time had arrived for Him to go from them to remain in the enjoyment of peace. We know and believe that Jesus left this world and ascended into heaven, to prepare a place for us. We had lost heaven, but He regained it for us. He again opened heaven to us, that pleasant, happy place, which will be our home for all eternity.

But, for now, we are not in that place, yet.

Friends, as Christians today, we all sit in-between the “already” and the “not yet.” Christ has already died, risen, and ascended, making possible the new life we have in Him through His Spirit that live within us. But more is yet to come. We believe that someday He will return for us and we’ll be home with Him forever. When is that? No one knows for sure, and it’s better not to guessing because what is more important is our attempt to answer this question:

So, what do we do in this *in-between* place or moment?

Jesus commissioned all of us to be His faithful witnesses until He comes, wherever we are and wherever we go. Like the disciples, we cannot do this on our own but must rely on something. As human we are so limited and vulnerable. It only possible if we rely on the empowering of the Holy Spirit. It interesting how Jesus left without saying good bye, but by promising something.

In some way, it is so comforting when someone you love leave you but before that they promisethat they will come back. And that’s happen with Jesus on that time. He doesn’t give a chance for disciple to say good bye because he surely now, that He will come back for a second time later, and will come back soon, and by soon I refer to the next 10 days, but in different form, theform of Spirit, that make it possible for Him to live within them. And within each one of us.

That make it possible for Him not only be around us in the form of human body, but become onebody with us and guiding us to living our life in this beautiful but broken world, before we departto the peaceful eternity.

I remember when I learn English, someone told me that good bye means God be with you. I’munsure if that’s true or not. But today, in the ascension of Jesus Christ, we listen and read to thestory where Jesus says good bye to the disciples and in his promise, he said that there will be a

thing he will send to help the disciples, which now we call the Holy Spirit, the Living God, or perhaps I should say, the Spirit of Living God that will be within them. The one they can't see, they can't hold, but they can feel her presence.

The interesting way to see the moment where Jesus 'left' his disciples by seeing it through the perspective where Jesus left his disciples meant that there is trust. That Jesus believed in them. He believed that they were ready for the next phase of spiritual growth, even without his teaching and him being around. Jesus, too, knew that good-byes and transitions are hard. But it needs to be happened, anyway.

Same as some of us, who are parents, know that there will be a moment in our life when we need to "left" our kids, and by left I mean, to let our kids living their own life, moving out from home, choose their partner, and so on. There is always time where we need to say good bye, not because we don't care to each other anymore, but because we know that it's part of the phase of life. And it can only happen because we trust that they will be alright without our dictation to them every day or every time, as what we do when they are in their young age.

And today, remembering Ascension of Jesus Christ, PCC also be aware of Truth, Healing, and Reconciliation which is one of important action in the time of between. The time of between the past and the future. The time of between trauma of what happened in the past and hope for the healing and reconciliation process. And I believe, with The Spirit of Living God within us, God asks us to act for peace, for ask the forgiveness and be forgiving, and to be aware of and pray for healing for Indigenous families and communities, who are struggling with intergenerational trauma from Residential Schools and other forms of colonial violence, in particular.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, The Spirit that Jesus has promised us during the long absence until he returns is function as the Comforter. The Spirit is the Empowering One who will lead into the work to which God has called us. This Spirit will strengthen and fortify our lives and work to destroy the fences that keep people separated from each other or even hating each other.

As the disciples were in the time of between, between the absence of Jesus and the presence of Holy Spirit, we all, as the church, in different way, is in an in-between time as well. We are already in the time where the Holy Spirit present, but waiting for Jesus to return to the earth, to claim his faithful followers. And we have been given an assignment. To be witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ to in this area, beyond here, and everywhere to all the ends of the earth. And like Peter and James and John, and the rest of the disciples, it is the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to do that.

This task is difficult and challenging, I know. But remember as written in John 14, Jesus says, *"And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* What a beautiful assurance after doing a big task.

So, the question for us now, what do we want to do in this time of between and waiting, as an action welcoming the Spirit of God? Do we want to keep our old way of life? Or we want to rely on the Spirit that much more powerful than we are? And try our best to be witnesses everywhere God send us to?

Amen!