

Ascension Sunday

John 17:1-11

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May 24, 2020

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Transitional space. Liminality. Time of change. Interlude. All of these words could be used to describe the current state of our world. How can we ever go back to normal? Should we ever go back to normal? The world is changing. The pandemic has forced our hand on so many issues and is changing lives and institutions and nations quicker than any other thing has in my memory. Some long to go back to normal but I am not sure that anything will ever be the same.

During this season of Eastertide, we experience a similar transitional period in our biblical texts. Jesus has died and now been resurrected. He is spending a short period of time on earth in his resurrected state before leaving the disciples to take over the family business. The disciples have just gone through a roller coaster ride of emotions as the person who they thought would lead them in a glorious rebellion against Rome was killed and then miraculously risen from the dead. They are ready for the revolution and ready to follow. But instead Jesus tells them that he is leaving again and that they are to take up the revolution themselves. They will be the ones to change the world in Jesus' name. Life will never be the same for the disciples. They are no longer students of Jesus, but are instead sent out as emissaries of God's divine love to the world.

And in our text today, Jesus is preparing the disciples for what comes next. Jesus is preparing them to make the world a better place. Jesus is preparing them to

be leaders instead of followers. And with all of the emotions, all the fears and anxieties, all of the unknowns about the future, Jesus prays. Jesus prays for the disciples. And Jesus prays for us. Yes, Jesus even prays for us.

Jesus prays that we may have eternal life, which he describes as a life of knowing God. And Jesus asks that through his glory, by which he means his crucifixion, that we would be protected especially in the days and weeks to come as we learn a new normal and continue the revolution of love that Jesus kicked off. Jesus' prayer is meant to prepare us for the next adventure, the new normal, the reshaping of our world and our consciousness. How are we being changed and transformed in this transitional period so that we can help reshape the world to be more loving and more grace filled? Maybe we are feeling more compassion for those who are homebound and will do more to care for them once we are out of lockdown. Maybe we are seeing ways of connecting and relating that are deeper than what we used to do. Maybe we are finding new ways of reaching out to people through technology that we can incorporate into our new future. Maybe we are realizing our deep need for community and will work hard to continue this unity and deep connection.

Jesus' resurrection that we celebrate during this Eastertide season is not the end of the story but rather the beginning. Our biblical texts have been looking these

last several weeks at what Jesus did post-resurrection and in preparation for his disciples beforehand. But today is the day on the church calendar that we call Ascension Sunday. It is the day we remember the story from Luke and Acts where Jesus left the earth, like he speaks about in our text, and now the disciples are left to be Jesus' emissaries to the world.

What does that mean for us today in this period of transition. From the way things used to be to the new normal that we can help create. What do we keep? What do we discard? What new ways of loving and caring for our neighbors, the world, and ourselves can we start to practice as individuals and as a church? How do we continue this revolution of love that Jesus commanded us to continue?

And instead of pontificating on this longer. I would like to read the Ascension story from Acts 1 for us and then close us in a prayer based on Jesus' prayer for us. Listen to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up,

and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”

Let us pray. Father, Mother, and Parent of us all. The hour has come, we remember this hour on this Ascension Sunday. You have glorified your son, Jesus and you have given us eternal life. You have given us knowledge of you through your son’s glory. You have given us knowledge of grace and mercy that overflows from you to us.

It is time. Jesus started this revolution of love, a reshaping of the world, and he has called us to continue that loving work. “Why do we stand looking up toward heaven” when you have called us to work right here on earth? For now Jesus is no longer in the world, but we are in the world. Holy God, protect us, so that we may be one, as you are one. Protect us so that as we begin to reshape the world, it would be in your loving image instead of our own self-destructive image. Give us all the tools we need in this in-between period to prepare ourselves for this revolution of love. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.