

The Ascension
St. Luke 24:44-53
June 2nd, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Good-bye and Hello

“Parting is such sweet sorrow.” Words from Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare, words which are no less true today, but a part of the human experience.

We all desire to hold onto the status quo as long as we can. It is what we know. It brings us a sense of security and in that security, comfort. Why can't things just stay the same?

The answer is in one word, immutable and unavoidable and a part of the human experience we can count upon, and that word is: CHANGE.

This is what the disciples face this morning as Jesus takes them out to that lonely hill across from Jerusalem and bids them a fond and loving farewell. He blesses them and sends them forth to work in preaching and teaching the Gospel.

But they are sad. They do not want him to leave. They linger in the mountaintop, watching Him disappear into the haze of the clouds. The book of Acts records what happened in this way:

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” [Acts 1:11-14]

This is the inner circle of those who were closest to Jesus. They had many emotions pressing upon their attention. One was the poignant feeling of sadness that they would not see Jesus again in this life. One was anxiety about what would come next. Should they return to their work and

livelihoods previous to meeting Jesus, or was something else in the cards for them, something else pulling them to commit themselves and their lives to what they had learned, seen and witnessed for themselves? They gathered together to pray quietly and sort out their emotions.

God is with us. Emanuel! We are those whom Jesus blessed because we do believe, though we did not see these events of the Gospel first hand. Remember the encounter with Jesus that we read about several weeks ago with Thomas the disciple, who came to be known as “doubting” Thomas?

It is not easy to be alone. It is not easy to feel left behind. It could make you feel abandoned. But God did not abandon us on that mount. God came to be with us and walk among us visibly for a brief time. Now that time has come to a close. But God is not abandoning us. How do we know? Because of Emanuel! God has always been with us, closer than the toes on our feet or the hair on top of our heads. God walks in the valley of the shadow of death with us, and does not leave us to walk alone through this scary place. And we know that, because in some small way at least, we have all sensed God’s ongoing presence with us. I have been so blessed throughout my life and into the present. God is never far from me. God has blessed me. God knows my needs before I ask. God gently guides me with God’s staff. I am not lost. I have been found. I am not abandoned and alone. God is with me. Emanuel.

I am reminded of this in the words of the old spiritual hymn:

“I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on roses
And the voice I hear falling
On my ear the Son of God discloses

And He walks with me and He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known

He speaks and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing

And He walks with me and He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known”

So we encounter many crossroads of change in our lives. These are times when the present is slowly transitioning to the past, if we are lucky, such that we can accept and adjust to the change before us. And then there is change that is more precipitous, and even then, we can be prepared. We are not alone. Those we love and who love us will support us. God is with us always.

You have heard it said that there are only two things certain that never change in this life: Death and Taxes. I disagree! There is one thing that never changes: The love of God.

“God be with you always,” my mother wrote to me in an old prayer book I had been gifted with by her. I have never forgotten her words or her prayer for me. It is a phrase I often repeat to myself as a reminder that God is with me always. I invite you also to use the phrase. May God be with you always, and may you feel it and believe it, AMEN.