

Easter 7 A 2020

Acts 1:6-14

John 17:1-11

Jesus has gone into heaven,
However you picture that:
Whether it's beautiful and mysterious,
With radiant clouds,
Or comical,
With levitating feet,
Or possibly boring.
More than likely,
It mostly seems irrelevant.

How much time,
Really,
Do you spend wondering about the Ascension?

In what is supposed to be
one of the steppingstone moments of our faith,
Jesus,
Who by a great mystery
Was born as one of us
And by a greater mystery
Died our death
And is now alive, fully and forever,
Now at his Ascension is gathered into a cloud,
And vanishes from our sight.

With the disciples, named and unnamed,
Men and women,
We gaze at the vanishing glory,
And perhaps we hear a voice from heaven.
Usually, of course, at such a moment,
An angel says,
Don't be afraid.
But this time, the voice of God says,
Why are you standing there gobsmacked?
Why are you looking up toward heaven?

Jesus will come back.
But not now.

When confronted with the great mysteries of our faith,
We cannot help ourselves.

We ask, perhaps not rational,
But reason-bound questions.
We want to unpack the mysteries,
And then lock them up tight.

We want to know what is going to happen.
We want to be in control.

And so we ask questions over and over,
Questions we have asked in different ways,
Many times before,
And always, we get the same answer.
Lord Jesus, is this the time?
Is this the time you are going to do what we want?
What we expect you to do?
Are you finally going to be who we want you to be?
Will you keep us safe?
Make us strong?
Show us what will happen
So that we can be prepared?

These questions are always there.
The friends of Jesus have not changed.
Just because they have seen him in his risen life,
Doesn't mean they have let go fear, anxiety, the longing to control.
They are, after all, just like us.

His friends, you might think,
Having encountered him in his renewed life,
Would be wondering in new ways.
Letting go, perhaps,
Of the need to know times,
Places, explanations.
Letting go, perhaps,
The need for assurance,
The need for safety,
For affirmation,
For vindication.

And yet, they keep asking
The same old reason-based, anxious, needy questions.
Just like us.
Are you going to restore the kingdom now?
Are you going to fulfill our hopes,
In the way we want,
When we want?

They wanted to know about restoring the kingdom.
Their hopes were bound up in their history.
They could not yet see the new.

They want to know facts, dates, times,
Events.
They want certainty.

And still, as Jesus did in life,
Now after his death
And from the heart of his renewed life,
He speaks to them of a new mystery,
Beyond their understanding.

They want certainty,
But they get a mystery.
A promise of the unknown.
Power from on high.
Power that will not restore the old center of the world;
power to send them out to the ends of the earth,
Telling a story beyond reason.

But before the power from on high,
A glory that will lift them up
And transform them,
Before the wonder, comes the waiting.
As it does for us.

In a church like ours,
We revel in the seasons of waiting,
As long as we have them well under control.
As long as we know exactly when,
And how, the waiting will end.
We love the waiting of Advent.
We are proud of the disciplines of waiting in Lent.

But this waiting time,
So often ignored,
This little waiting time in the season of the Ascension,
This is suddenly, unexpectedly,
Our season.

Ascension – who knew? –
Is the mystery for our times,
These times we never would have chosen,

Cannot understand, and cannot escape.

Ascension is a loss,
A letting go.
It is a relinquishment of something we thought had been restored.
A second leave-taking,
Harder to understand.
A sudden insight
That the world is more mysterious
Than we had known.
A moment to admit
That we are not in control.

No wonder we downplay this steppingstone
On the great journey of our history with God.

Ascension is a story of promise,
But at its heart
Is the message we can never get used to:
Not yet.

This is our not yet time.
All our hopes, all our questions are founded on when,
But this is a not yet time.

We have different questions now,
But at heart they are the same.
We ask,
When will there be an effective treatment?
When will there be a safe and reliable vaccine?
When can we come back to church?
When can we take, bless, break and share the bread
And offer up the cup?

When will there be universal healthcare?
When will there be a safe place to rest
For every person who cannot shelter in place
Because they have no shelter?
When will there be full, safe, unquestioned access
To the right to vote?
When will the kingdom come?

We can't know the answers to these questions.
We can't see into the mystery.
We can't even, really, if the truth be told,
Understand what Jesus is saying

In today's gospel,
In his long, mystical address
To the Holy One he calls Father.
Oneness, glory, yours, mine,
Truth.

If we try to pull this prophetic utterance apart,
We end up with a clutter of words
That will hardly fit together.
We have no control here.
Can we learn to float on the words,
Or sink into them,
Instead of taking the drops
And putting them under a microscope?
Floating and examining are both important,
At different times,
And for different reasons.
What is important now?
For us, as the body of Christ?

Can we let go?
Can we let go the need to know?
Can we be in this season?
Can we float on the assurance of God's presence,
Even in the absence of Jesus?
Can we wait,
Not as we usually wait,
Knowing the beautiful ending?
But can we wait,
Not knowing what will happen,
Or when, or how,
Or what the future will be?

This is what it means to trust,
The wise ones tell us.

Trust that whatever the future holds,
And whenever it comes,
If God is good,
It will be good.
Since God is good,
It will be good.

Trust that when the Holy Spirit comes –
And that will happen –
We will find within ourselves new power.

Power to stop waiting, and get moving.
Power to become –
And this is a wonder and a mystery –
Power to become, with God,
Co-creators of the good future
That we cannot yet see.

That time is coming.
But it is not quite yet.
For now,
Let Ascension,
The neglected, unwanted moment in our lives,
Be a time when the holy is present,
Knowable, trustworthy, and true.

I never thought it would be like this.
But I believe – I trust –
That this Ascension moment is a steppingstone on the way
To a future already unfolding
And preparing to flower into good.

He say I know you, you know me
One thing I can tell you is
You got to be free
Come together, right now
Over me