

Luke 24:44-53
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“Ascension Day”

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This past week a Christian celebration passed us by, hardly noticed by most people in the church. There were no sales in our favorite store or holiday decorations to put up. This past Thursday was Ascension Day. In the Christian tradition, this is the day the Risen Savior departs from earth to take up permanent residence with God in heaven and sends the Holy Spirit to be God’s continuing presence and power.

Michael Bird comments on the ascension, “Sadly, the ascension is something of a poor cousin in terms of the theological significance attached to it and the relative neglect of its celebration. For many Christians Jesus’ Ascension is a kind of optional ending. For other Christians, the ascension is something of an embarrassment, it represents the lingering belief in a scientifically outdated worldview which pictures a three-story universe with Jesus magically launched into a heaven which ancient people assumed was only a few hundred feet above the clouds.

But I believe Jesus’ Ascension holds great significance for Christians. The Ascension is the short pause between the moment when Jesus leaves and ascends into heaven, until the gusty winds of God’s Spirit begin to blow. The ascension story becomes a bridge for the people who believed in the resurrection; to ride the winds of the Spirit as they form the community of the church.

The scary part of this story for those first century followers was that Jesus’ bodily presence was leaving. Like child going off to military duty, or college, or a spouse leaving on a long business trip, or a dear friend moving away. Jesus Christ, this leader, this mighty one who had gotten the disciples out of every jam, this friend who showed them the way of life, is leaving. How would they go on?

But, no surprise, Jesus leaves his followers some gifts.

First, he tells his followers to remember. Some of you are deeply aware how those people who leave us, are still with us in many ways. They may die, or move, or simply withdraw from our friendship, but we still remember.

Jesus wants his followers to remember him. Not in a nostalgic way, but remember all that they have been through; the last supper, feeding the hungry crowd of 5000, calming the stormy sea of galilee, walking on water, healing. He wants the memories his followers carry to intentionally shape their lives every day.

The second gift Jesus gives his followers is the invitation to “Wait.” Now waiting is a gift which is a lot like unwrapping socks on Christmas morning, we know we need it, but it isn’t

really the gift we wanted. We don't like to wait. In our impatient, high speed, 2-hour delivery world; Jesus reminds us of the gift of waiting. Don't force things, don't try to do it all yourself, don't worry if it seems as if nothing is going on, it is very possible something is germinating.

Jesus asks his followers to Wait, which we forget can have great value. It takes 9 months for the miracle of human childbirth; and if we think we are patient, Elephants are pregnant for nearly 2 years. New life takes time and preparation. And a step in the process is waiting, discerning, praying, and cooperating.

Thirdly, Jesus says, "You will be my witnesses." So, we won't be left waiting forever. There is a path to new life and Jesus is calling his disciples to embody it through their lives. A world then and now, filled with hate, and poorly processed fear; a world worshipping empty idols of greed and prejudice. A world where forgiveness has been diluted.

The Common English Bible has the ascending Christ say, "A change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name, to all nations... You are my witnesses of these things."

How different might our world look if we all began from a foundation of admitting mistakes have been made. It's a powerful way to begin dialogue. What if nations agreed that foreign policy talks would begin with a recognition of the need to repent and forgive their sins toward each other. What if relations with the First Nation people of North America began with a premise that we would repent and forgive? What if discussions about Racism, and privilege, and sexism, and homophobia began, not with accusation as they so often do; but with forgiveness and repentance? Would we not all be more willing to sit at the discussion table and listen? This is the change of heart and life Jesus wants us to preach.

The final gift Jesus offers is "power from on high." This may be the most confusing gift. I was struggling with how to present this in a sermon when I read one of the daily devotions from Rev. Cameron Trimble. I'd like to share it with you.

"Each of us has a source of wild creativity in us. We are built to give birth, to bring things, ideas, and people to life. At our deepest core, we are created to write, sing, dance, and love new life into being. We are born wild, in tune with our intuitions of how to make a more beautiful world.

All too early in life, our domesticated circumstances tell us to tame this wild creativity. We might become too creative, too innovative, too free. We might test social boundaries or question authority. We might get arrogant or too sure of ourselves and discover we are more powerful than even we knew. We are told from a young age to hold back, to moderate, to question our ability to contribute... If we follow this advice it wounds our soul.

I'm convinced that we are living in the midst of an awakening of our wild souls. Some of us I've come to call *Wisdom Warriors* sense a new level of creativity emerging in ourselves, one

that lead us on the healing path to a deeper awareness of the Creative force that is within. If you are one of those, you aren't crazy... Keep leading forward with the truth you know in the deepest parts of your soul. It's your authentic wildness, not your conformity that the world really needs."

We hear the disciples were so overwhelmed with astonishment, so wrapped up in the mystery of the Ascension that they were nearly paralyzed, left prostrate on the ground.

Most of us are not good at lying around prostrate on the ground, so let's get out there, trusting that our ministry is infused with power from on high to bring new life into being.

Amen