

The Ascension of our Lord – 05/12/2024

Today we are celebrating the Ascension of our Lord. This actually happened on Thursday, 40 days after Easter. It is when Jesus officially, physically, goes back home. Luke feels it is important enough to share it in his Gospel briefly and then in more detail in Acts.

For the Gospel writer John, it was also important, as it was always death, resurrection and ascension. Although John only said it was going to happen, but never told the story, we only find the actual account in Luke-Acts.

When people leave us, to stay overnight for the first time, to go off to live elsewhere from what has been called home, we don't really know when or whether we will see them again. It normally gives us pause. We may linger after that good-bye or see you later. It may take us a bit to resume and continue on. Sometimes it gets easier.

Then there is that time that we lose a loved one. It could be a friend, parent, sibling or partner/spouse. It hurts as we come to realize that we will not see them again until we go to join them. It can take time to move forward, at first it may be slow. Even after we get moving forward, there will be days or so that we stop and process before we can move forward again.

Even though leaving is part of life it is not easy. Moving forward and at what speed looks and feels different for everyone. The leaving/grieving process requires giving others and ourselves space. One needs to experience it, before we can move forward. Without acknowledging the feelings and giving ourselves permission we may always come back to the same place.

In turning to our Ascension Sunday stories, we are reminded that Jesus had told his disciples to remain in Jerusalem after the resurrection. He told them to wait for what God had promised. Jesus reminded them that he had been baptized by John the Baptist with water, but within a few days he will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

We know what is coming and that is the Holy Spirit, Pentecost. This happens 50 days after Jesus' resurrection. The disciples did not know what they would be experiencing. Thus, Jesus was saying just wait and you will get what you need to be my witnesses.

Now I must say the disciples had a little bit different experience in Jesus leaving. While they were meeting together, they were wondering if Jesus was going to restore the kingdom of Israel. In other words, bring restoration back that

God would be reigning. Jesus says, it is not for you to know when this will happen. I'm sure this caused great anxiety.

Jesus goes on to tell them that they will be his witnesses to Judea and Samaria and even to the ends of the earth. He is alluding to Jews and Gentiles, that is everyone. This is the disciples' commission to continue the work that he had begun with them.

Having said this, he was lifted up into a cloud before their eyes and taken from their sight. I can almost safely say that none of our loved ones left us in that way. What could they do but continue looking up. Is this it? Is he gone forever? Does this mean that we are on our own now? What was going to happen to and/or for them in Jerusalem?

It was normal for them to be lingering and taking some space to be in that moment. There are times that all of us need someone to say don't forget that I am here for you and with you. Two messengers dressed in white stood beside them and asked, "You Galileans, why are you standing here looking into the skies? Jesus, who has been taken from you, this same Jesus will return, in the same way you watched him go up into heaven."

I'm not sure how quickly any of us could have moved forward from there. First Jesus goes up into the air, then these two messengers dressed in white say Jesus will return in the same way. It is a great deal to process. There was at least some precedent for going up into the air as this is what Elijah did. Also, we are not sure what happened to Moses.

Moving forward is not easy as many of us have and are experiencing. Faith Lutheran Church is working on moving forward. The transition team is in the process of writing the Ministry Site Profile. Many of you have been waiting to hear this.

As a community of faith, we have paused in some respects to examine who we are, who is our neighbor, and what God is calling us to do. On the other hand, ministry has not stopped as the Holy Spirit has still been moving and we have continued witnessing. Taking time and space in the midst of doing ministry is not easy.

Sitting can often seem like wasting time, but it can also be a time of refocusing and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us. When we give ourselves permission to stop and rest in Jesus, we often see and hear more than we want to. At that point human nature often says get up and get moving.

It is often hard to see and hear what God is calling us to do. Whatever it is will require change. This is true for us as individuals and as a community of faith.

We are challenged then to trust the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will speak to us in many different ways, scripture, others, or events.

This is where I have the difficult part, to know when to sit and when to move. Most often our human nature relies on anxiety to know these things. This is not usually the Holy Spirit's timing, it is ours. When we rely on our timing, we will not be the effective witnesses that we are called to be.

The disciples did not technically have the Holy Spirit yet to be the effective witnesses that they were called to be. We do have the Holy Spirit. Our challenge on this Ascension Sunday is to take the time to rest in the Spirit and deal with our anxiety to discern when to move forward and when to sit.

I believe this is true for every thing in our lives as individuals and as a community of faith. Discernment is not really a one human person determination. It takes listening to those who can be objective and taking it back to the Spirit to check it out. I believe just as the disciples had the two messengers, we do also. They come in different forms at different times.

Look and listen for these messengers. When we find times that we are in discernment or asking questions or maybe running to fast, stop and sit with the Spirit. The Spirit will eventually tell us when it is time to move forward.

We will experience times of anxiety when there is leaving and grieving in our individual lives, it happens in communities of faith. When something makes us uncomfortable, I challenge us to sit with the Holy Spirit. Look and listen for the messengers that God in Jesus Christ will send to us.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, the only way that we can be effective witnesses is to trust the Spirit and listen for her discernment.

Let us pray, Gracious God, we thank you for sending Jesus to earth to model for us how to live out our lives in you, loving you and our neighbor. As we live out our lives we find out that there will be times of leaving/grieving. You provide your presence in so many ways to help us through these times which involve change. May you Holy Spirit help us to stop and rest in you when we are anxious and uncomfortable in life. Help us to know your time table as to sitting and moving forward. In Jesus name, Amen.