

Seventh Sunday of Easter – The Sunday after Ascension Day

Readings: Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-22;
John 17:1-11

In John's Gospel, the Ascension story comes before Jesus is arrested, tortured and crucified. That's not right according to our church calendar. But John's account is exactly what we have lived through.

At the bedside of my father, he was well aware he would live a day or two. He said his goodbyes; he worded his love for us as best he could, and then, like an old cowboy, he wanted to die alone.

Many of us have witnessed John's version of Ascension. We too have joined the vigil with the one near death. They will tell us, 'I will not be with you much longer. I'm not afraid. I just want ya'll to love one another when I'm gone.' All of us in those rooms know our relationships will change and our loved one is leaving.

When I visit folks, I love to look at the photographs of family. Folks will carefully tell a story about each picture. Many of the pictures are of folks who have died. We know that this family has lived Ascension. They have experienced loss and now they can tell stories.

All of us have suffered all kinds of loss: the loss of sight or hearing, loss of job, loss of a beloved pet, and the death of a loved one.

And yet, we are here in this place. We are here where the largest symbol we see is the cross. Are we crazy? Are we in denial? No, we continue to live, and strangely enough, we're doing okay.

We have lived through shock and suffering. Our minds and bodies tuned out for a while. After a time, we begin to learn how to exist, and after a year or so, we begin to reach out and help people again.

Ascension, what we could never live without, takes on new meaning. Ascension makes each of us the living presence of Christ. We are not the assistant or the student. We have moved from disciple to Apostle. We are growing up. I'm not smart enough, or good enough, or versed enough in the Bible...excuses don't cut it.

The mission of mature Christians is not rocket science. Love one another as I have loved you. Know compassion and justice and care for the least of these.

Jesus is not here to do it for us. The geyser of love has spread up and out and rains compassion and justice on our heads and in our hearts. No matter how

close or how far we are from our moments of Ascension, we will continue to share and be the presence of God.

Today we celebrate Ascension. Hallmark doesn't make Ascension cards --- yet. So we'll have to make our own. For example: "Ascension is not related to 'no child left behind'". Or, "The Ascension has not been on the best sellers list...that was the Rapture".

The reason we don't have a marketing plan for Ascension? Ascension and loss are companions. Ascension and death come to party together. No one wants to try and sell items related to loss and death.

We have the corner of the market on this one!

We are accustomed to loss and death. Both are real and with us at all times. We even have pictures of Jesus, dead in the arms of Mary. We are not concerned about death.

Ours is not a happy long life. Our goal is to love mercy and justice and care for others. Our goals will create a totally different agenda, totally different objectives than having a happy, fun-filled, exciting life.

Don't you love HGTV where the 30 year old are remodeling their \$900,000 home so they can entertain friends? While here at St. Andrew's, we are cleaning our own toilets, mowing our own grass so we can save \$7000?

What folks do with their life energy is certainly a choice. Disciples and Apostles have made a choice. We have decided to follow Jesus. We have decided to grow into the full statue of Christ. We have decided to seek the abundant life of compassion and service to others.

Our reward is not happiness. Our reward is the reality that we are responding to God's call. Try to do otherwise and the Hound of Heaven will never let go.

Remember Ascension. Ascension is the dark ominous cloud that rains and pours hope and new life even when all is lost.

Happy Ascension. What goes up must come down! Amen.

Rev. Will Hinson
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