

Year A
7 Easter
Ascension Sunday
Acts 1:6-14

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Will wonders never cease?

The disciples have seen their beloved Jesus crucified, dead, and resurrected. They have had 40 days of quality time, listening and learning. Now the eleven apostles see Jesus taken bodily up into heaven.

Will wonders never cease?

Jesus told them that they, “will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon” them. They don’t really know what that means, and don’t know what to expect, or when to expect it, because they were really still expecting Jesus to be the military messiah. Did you notice that they asked, “Lord, is *this* the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus has told them again and again in various ways, that he was not going to overthrow Rome, and that the disciples’ vision of what “kingdom” meant was much too small, but they still seem to be stuck there.

And Jesus is leaving. Just before this passage, he tells them that when he goes, he wants them to stay together in Jerusalem, until the time when he will baptize them with Holy Spirit “not many days from now.” Jesus will be gone, but his Spirit will be with them. Eventually. Soon. They can’t know when or how God will accomplish this, but in the *meantime* they are to stay together in Jerusalem. Our marking this Ascension Day is a way of showing us what we should be doing “in the meantime.”

Clearly, we should not be standing around, looking for Jesus to come out of the sky. The two men in white, who suddenly appeared, scold the apostles for doing that. So the eleven (Luke lists them all by name) go back to Jerusalem, to an upper room where the rest of their group was waiting for them. Notice that being in community is important for

Jesus's followers. They stay together for mutual support. Not just the eleven apostles, but also "Mary the mother of Jesus," other women, and Jesus's brothers. Luke says they constantly devoted themselves to prayer. And they wait.

Waiting is hard under most circumstances, and as 21st century people we are particularly bad at waiting. Really, we expect many things to happen in a matter of seconds (like getting information—hey Siri); we expect deliveries of things we've ordered to come in a day or two; expect even food to be served hot, in our car, in a matter of minutes. But, like the disciples in Jerusalem, we *also* are called to wait, and to pray. Because Jesus has ascended, and he has *already* sent his Holy Spirit to us—and he says he will come again. With Jesus's resurrection, God's kingdom is here, now, and is *also* still to come. It's both/and, which is another thing that we have trouble with. The kingdom is at hand, AND Jesus says he will come again.

In the meantime, we are to wait and to pray. We pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We ask that we do God's will here, as it is done in heaven—in heaven where God rules in love. We're praying that we will act in love, not out of a desire for power, or for control, or because of wealth. We're praying that we, like that earliest group of disciples in the upper room, can reflect God's love in the way we serve others.

To do this, we need God's help. We need that gift of the Holy Spirit. We also need to be open to the possibility that we can be inspired, be led, by that same Spirit. Can we, as a congregation, be transformed by the Spirit, and led to new life as a result? Do we even want that?

I think the greatest gift *we* could give to Jesus is to receive what he gives us.

Amen