

Epworth Chapel on the Green
May 20, 2007
Ascension Sunday
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Acts 1:1-11
Psalm 110:1-5
Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 24:49-53

Our lessons for today place us in the setting where it has been 40 days or so since Jesus' resurrection. With each passing appearance of Jesus, and with his continued teaching about the Kingdom of God, the disciples become more and more convinced (and more and more confident!) that this is indeed the "real deal." Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, who has defeated sin and death.

The more time they spend with Jesus, the more they find themselves thinking, "we could really get used to this. Jesus has been raised up from death, and now we can go with him and be involved in what he is doing."

How disheartening, then, when Jesus begins to tell them that he must go away. How unsettling when he begins to tell them that he is no longer going to be present with them in the way he is with them now. How unnerving it must be when he tells them that he is going away, but they are not to go back to "business as usual." They are to wait in Jerusalem for what he has promised them.

This is unsettling for the disciples, because they want to hold on to Easter and the risen Lord. And yet their risen Lord is now calling them to let go, and to look to the coming Spirit as the One who will lead them into the future.

Although we have not had the privilege of being with the earthly or risen Jesus, we can empathize with the disciples. We understand all too well the challenges that confront us when God wants to start a new chapter in our lives and calls on us to “let go” of the comfort zones we have built around us and to open ourselves to an uncertain future.

God is faithful to us in these seasons of change and transition, even as he was with the disciples as they faced their transition. *What is hard for us is that we, like the disciples, must wait on God to clothe us with the Spirit and to empower us for whatever it is that he is leading us to do.*

Do you remember Clark Kent, who would transform himself into Superman? Do you recall how the transformation always took place? Every time Clark Kent would become Superman, he would go into a phone booth and strip off his ordinary business suit, revealing his official Superman costume. Amazingly, Clark Kent could only stop locomotives and lift skyscrapers when he was properly clothed in the outfit that revealed his true identity.

In a similar way, I think this is what Jesus is trying to do with his disciples. They are so used to Jesus being with them that they do not see that God’s plan is

not complete, that there is more to be done, and that an unsettling transition is necessary. Jesus is trying to show them that the Father's plan must move forward, but the disciples will only be able to share in that plan if they wait on God and are clothed with the power of the Spirit. For it is the Spirit who will give them their true identity, and enable them to do the tasks that lie ahead.

Do you remember the words of the creed which we say each week?

Speaking of Jesus, we say, "he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

God's great plan for the world did not end with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, as wonderful as that is. And God's plan for the disciples didn't end there, either. There was more to be done. But in order for that to happen, the disciples were being called to let go of Jesus as they knew him, to trust him when he said that God would lead them into an uncertain future.

And so it is with us. God's plan did not end with Jesus' resurrection. There is more to be done, and God calls on us to be involved. Jesus may be physically *absent*, but that does not mean he is not *present* with us. For the Spirit comes to empower us and give us what we need, so that in some mysterious way we now can become the presence of Jesus in the world.

This is a little unsettling. It sometimes can require of us that we "let go" of our comfortable ways of knowing Jesus so that God can move us into the next

phase of his work in our lives. And it can be unsettling for the Church, as she struggles to come to grips with the daunting task of being Jesus' hands, feet, and voice in a hurting world.

As we gather at the Lord's Table this morning, we do so as those whom Christ has called to help carry on his work until Jesus returns and the Father brings everything to completion. May the Spirit who clothed the disciples with power from on high also clothe us and give us our true identity. May we receive grace to "let go" of our comfortable ways of knowing Jesus, and faith to follow him into an uncertain future.

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