

Ascension Sunday, Year A
Acts 1:1-14; John 17:1-11

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We are coming to the end of the fifty days of Easter. The disciples had spent forty days witnessing the resurrected Jesus giving them “many convincing proofs” that he was indeed alive again, after suffering death. They had forty days of Jesus “speaking about the Kingdom of God.” The disciples have had forty amazing days of time that they could have never imagined possible with their resurrected teacher and Lord. But – there are fifty days of Easter. We are at Ascension Sunday, forty-three days after we celebrated Jesus’ resurrection, and there are seven more days to go until Pentecost. The disciples and the world were again without Jesus but it was different than the last time. We find them standing with their mouths agape, staring at the sky at the last point they saw his form rising. They were in awe, they were witnesses to something that had never happened before.

The last time they had all stood with their chins tilted up, it was at a different sort of lifting. They were looking up at the cross with that same dear friend and rabbi hanging from it, his body lifted high on a cross, but broken and sunken in death. His spirit was gone from them and the world – the Word was silent in his tomb, nothing but the sound of weeping and the scrape of the stone rolling across the door echoing on the rock walls of the chamber. There were three long days that time, before their Lord returned to them in the glory of his resurrection. They had spent many hours during their wait reminding each other that he had said he would come back. Maybe that was why Thomas needed to touch Jesus’ wound for proof before he would believe the other’s report. It was just too good to be true. And then they were blessed with forty days of over-time with Jesus. How could they ever ask for more time?

As they saw Jesus rising above them, they must have wondered when the next thing would happen: “he said “not many days longer” until the Holy Spirit will come.” Before he ascended, they asked Jesus, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?” No, their orders were to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit – that the Kingdom which God wanted to build was bigger than they could conceive. Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” So as Jesus ascended, those words may have held the disciples in place, with their eyes looking for more clues about the time to come.

In the meantime, the order was to stay put and wait. In other words, do nothing.

I wonder if that was hard for the disciples to do. I wonder if that would be hard for us to do. What if I said to you that taking ten days to do nothing and to wait for the Holy Spirit to come was exactly what God, Jesus, and Grace Church need you to do as you wait for Pentecost? What would that look like? How do we make time to listen for the Holy Spirit?

I’m currently reading a book entitled, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*, written by Brigid Schulte. The premise of the book is that our culture has moved toward a style of life where we seem to gain a type of stature by being or feeling over-worked, over-scheduled and sleep-deprived. I remember hearing years ago about the Japanese work culture where people would spend nearly every waking hour at work six days a week in an effort to appear essential – even though the total measured output was the same as the equivalent

worker in the USA, who worked a 40 hour work week. At the time I heard the news, it was meant to amaze us, the American audience. A decade or two later and it feels as if we are in the same dilemma – we are all rushing about with the demands of work, home, and family leaving us exhausted. Schulte writes, “A whole new field of research is beginning to look into why overwhelm matters. At what point does role overload lead to burnout and fatigue at work? When does it begin to tax the family system? How much [overwhelm] is required before a physical or emotional breakdown occurs?...The overwhelm...was about sustainable living, healthy populations, happy families, good business, sound economies and living the good life (Schulte p.24.)” I would add that it is about all these things and a mission and worshipping and joy-filled church community. How can we hear the Holy Spirit if our lives are filled with busy-ness, anxiety, and rushing about?

Can we even add “worship and wait for the Holy Spirit” to the list of *work, love, and play when no one has the time?*

We could start a new movement, a revival –well, maybe it would be better said a call to intentional un-movement, to rest, for these 10 days from Ascension to Pentecost. We all just stop and take a breath from the business of life and ministry and listen for the movement of the Holy Spirit. The disciples and the other followers spent their time between the ascension and Pentecost in prayer and in worship – their joy was so intense after witnessing the Ascension, that that was what they did: they prayed and worshiped.

What if we as a community, followed the model of that first group of disciples and spent these next ten days regrouping, worshipping, devoting ourselves to prayer and inviting the Holy Spirit to come and transform our lives and the world. Maybe we can’t take these days completely off. I need to come to work and do my work-a-day life. I am obligated to do a few things between now and Pentecost on June 8th. But I think I can dedicate some extra time for prayer, to sit quietly for ten minutes a day, or to think about ways I am experiencing the Holy Spirit in the world.

We have witnessed Jesus’ sacrifice for us during Holy Week, and then rejoiced in his resurrection during Easter. I don’t know about you, but it feels like we need what the disciples needed: a big time-out before we can really take in the Holy Spirit and discern the direction it will send us.

Amen.