

Ascension Sunday, May 16, 2010
Acts 1:1-11; Eph 1: 15-23; Luke 24:44-53
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This is the Sunday we celebrate the Ascension, and as I thought about it, I couldn't help but remember some of the unfortunate ways it has been illustrated in media and print. Jesus ascended to God, in mystery, in a way that defies description, but it is true. In Acts he is described as disappearing into a cloud. I began to think about clouds.

My husband and I discovered that both of us as children would lie in the grass and look at clouds. So we decided why stop. Clearly we are cloud watchers. Last week we were looking at storm clouds. They were blowing before the wind, changing shape. Some were filled with rain and charcoal grey. We could not see beyond them, yet we knew they were billowing white on the top. Clouds are beautiful and mysterious, they reveal and they hide.

Throughout scripture clouds are used as a sign of the presence of God. A cloud leads Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt. A cloud fills the Holy of Holies in the temple of Solomon and calls people to prayer. A cloud overshadowed the figures of Elijah, Moses and Jesus at the transfiguration, another moment of mystery, and a voice said, "this is my son, listen to him." At the Ascension, Jesus moves away from the disciples and a cloud overtakes him. It is said he ascended into heaven; he moved into God.

Each time the cloud, the presence of God, focuses God's people on the present moment, and calls them to action. God's saving movements throughout history also require human movement. The Israelites followed the great pillar of cloud that moved before them, even though they did not know where it would lead. The presence of God filled the temple and Solomon and all the people worshiped in a new and profound way. At the transfiguration, the disciples were to listen and learn from Jesus, and to know him as God's Son. At the ascension, Jesus, moved into God and the disciples stood staring, until two men in white called them to attention to the present, to their call and their mission in the here and now.

Whenever God moves, it is a call to action for those who love God. Whenever God moves you the people are equipped., blessed and gifted. Whenever God moves it is part of the one great saving movement of the creative life force and the love of a compassionate God. So we have salvation history still going forward. Jesus our great teacher continues to lead us into the idea of God with us. He steps

forward into God, to make room for the next part of this great movement, the coming of the Holy Spirit. And he says to the disciples to go and to wait.

God still asks us today to wait. To stop our active lives and wait in the silence of our hearts for the coming of the Spirit. Since the great movement that began with creation God has been coming ever closer to us. The scriptures are one long story of God moving into our hearts. In Jesus the Spirit of God acted in the life of a man to teach us and to model for us humanity as a compassionate force for goodness and a powerful agent for God's reign as opposed to the power of injustice and evil.

The apostles took in all these lessons. But one more thing was needed. The ability to wait with an open heart for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the one who could enter their hearts and souls and give them the faith and strength and wisdom to do God's will in the world. They were all so different, and yet their voices and their lives made a small sect into a world faith.

We are each unique, created by God in particular ways and God is waiting to gift and bless each one of us, just as Jesus blessed the apostles, to magnify those gifts for the good of many. How long has it been since you have set aside time to listen for God? How comfortable are you with silence, where there is no TV, no cell phone, no house phone, no i-pod, no radio, no computer, no people, no place you have to be? How long has it been since you have sat alone, or with like minded others and prayed simply for the presence of God, with no other request? The length of time since your last true silence may be an indicator of your willingness to be an agent for God in the world.

Those early disciples were followers of the Way of Jesus. They were willing to risk everything for the chance to tell even one more person about Jesus and the love of God. They were willing to slow down and wait for a promise of presence that would fill them with courage and direction. These were people of deep prayer, because Jesus had taught them to be so, and they knew what it meant to say "Come Lord Jesus, Come Holy Spirit" and mean it.

This is a dangerous prayer. It says, "I am waiting to hear where you would have me go and what you would have me do, for I am ready to do your will, not mine." If that prayer sounds familiar, it should. It is the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus. And they were willing to do it.

Are you willing?

We at St Luke's~San Lucas are in a time of waiting as well. We wait and we take stock of who we are, of who we may be called to be. It is a time of examining all our ministries and outreach, and to take time to discern not what we want but what is God's will for this community. Who are you, and what kind of leadership do you need so that St Luke's ~San Lucas is Christ in this place?

It is time for silence, individually and together, for prayer that is intentional in asking for the guidance of God, and silence so that all can hear the answer. It is time to remember how much love and courage and commitment there is in this church, and to focus those gifts on the life of the church community. No one of you is here by accident. God has called you here. Pray to discern the reason for that call, and take joy in it. No ministry exists by accident here. Pray for clarity in the future of all our ministries, and how you might participate, rejoice in that word from God, and act on it. Pray that God will guide you, then take time to listen, and share what you hear with others for the good of all. For the church is the body of Christ in the world, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

So here is the challenge. This week wait in the Jerusalem of your heart, like the disciples wait in Jerusalem. Take time each day in a quiet moment to pray for the presence of God. Then listen for a few minutes with patience, and continue to listen throughout your day for the answer. It will come, in the words and actions of others, in the experiences of your day. You will hear a common thread, a theme that comes back at least three times. When you have heard the third one, its time to act. God is patient, up to a point!

So, how will you remember?

Next time you see a cloud, which isn't hard in here, stop and remember that God is with you, rejoice, and pray.

Amen