

Sermon for 1 June 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Seventh Sunday of Easter/Ascension Sunday

Scriptures: Acts 1:1-11; Psalter: UMH781: Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 23:44-53

Sermon:

Imagine being told to “wait!” - --especially as Americans!

The commentaries say Ascension is less celebrated as a special day in churches in America than in Europe.

Maybe that says something about our national character. What do you think?

We’re doing it here @ Bethesda this year because of the peculiar confluence of calendar dates, which gives us a choice between just plain “seventh Sunday of Easter” and putting the two together ... at least that’s the way I put it together when I looked at the lectionary options.

We still think of ourselves as a “get it done!” people. After all, other people invented automobiles and radios and such ... but more people seem to want to come here than anywhere else, with all our quirks and issues.

But this is what stands out in particular in at least one of our texts for today. Luke wants the disciples back in Jerusalem where they will receive power to live as they have lived alongside him, when he is no longer thus, but is supplanted by the Holy Spirit.

Of course, scripture has it both ways and more times than are totally plain ... but for all the songs and spirituals about Jesus walking with me, and the prayer we learned at bedtime and the song we sang in Sunday School as little children, there is a point being made in this Ascension celebration.

The presence of Jesus, like that of God, is more than what we want as lovers or find as followers. More is yet to come, and our vocation is ... well, not a way of substitution, but a matter lifelong of patience, and preparation, and ... surrender, more and more and again and again and ...I can’t keep from saying it ... a different kind of loyalty than our national character finds easy to stick to.

It's giving us acute problems right now politically. As I read the Democrats and the Republicans, and all the side-line offshoots of both of them, very little of patience and tolerance, and forgiveness and listening, much less of loving thy neighbor as thyself, is coming through the news or the crowd, much less the highway and routine business of daily existence, among our melting-pot of backgrounds and upbringings, these days.

With all the issues our Lord is dealing with, however you want to put it ... whether you’re atheist or Methodist or anything else, sick or sound, new or mainly tired and confused ... or

bright, for that matter ... walking with Jesus or going it alone is not patient in the way that true adjustment is.

I don't know how to go further than this, except to pray. As I do, fill in the pauses.. Lean on the Lord. Fill in the blanks where I leave off. Think about how tenderness feels, both to you and to your neighbor, whether close or distant. We do practice a faith based on anticipation. St. Paul is not the only one who says it's no longer he, but Christ, that lives in his very being. There's lots to treasure and ponder, and this is the time of the week when we do it best, together, in many ways. Be alone together with me now. Wait, and watch, and breathe.

Let us pray.

Amen.