

## “It Won’t Be Long Now”

Acts 1:6-14; 5:6-11; John 17:6-19

May 13, 2018 – Ascension/J.O.Y. Sunday

Acts 1:6-14 (NRSV) <sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” {12} Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. {13} When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. {14} All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

John 17:6-19 (NRSV) {6} "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. {7} Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; {8} for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. {9} I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. {10} All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. {11} And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup>But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

A preacher found three little boys sitting on a curb playing hooky from school. "Don't you want to go to heaven?" he admonished them. "Sure do," two of the boys answered, but the third replied, "No sir." "What's the matter? You mean you don't want to go to heaven when you die?" "Oh, when I die!" exclaimed the youngster. "Of course I do, when I die. I thought you were getting up a crowd to go now."

What if Jesus said to his disciples, who for forty days have been waiting, forty days filled with all sorts of questions and mixed emotions, anxiousness and a good deal of fear, "come on guys, it's time, let's all go to heaven!" Don't you think they would have been all taking an excursion to the clouds. They've been waiting, and in Acts we're told that Jesus was 'staying' with them, for forty days since the resurrection. No longer on the road, forty days after they first got the good and almost unbelievable news that Jesus had somehow emerged from the terrible death they had witnessed, forty days of Peter's cigars and John's harmonica and Andrews dumb jokes, Jesus finally says, 'come on guys let's take a walk.' Only to find themselves standing with their eyes skyward, desperately trying to keep a grip on the faith that for forty days has gone up and down like a yoyo. From the empty tomb, to the doubt and amazement of Thomas, to the appearance at Emmaus, to the breakfast on the beach, and many other appearances and assurances -- they, and we, have come to this moment.

Standing and looking up, not quite believing what we've just seen, wishing he'd said, 'follow me' once more. And then he's gone. And two guys all in white,

*nothing unusual about that*, tell them, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Wondering what happens next. Wondering what to do. They go back to Jerusalem. And wait. Why, because Jesus told them to do just that. Acts says, "he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When they get back, which is said to be a 'sabbath days journey,' which means a pretty short distance, they find themselves once again, in the upper room -- a place of memory and familiarity. The disciples invite the women who are their to join them and they devoted themselves to prayer. Surely as they meditated and prayed on the three years plus the forty days they were with Jesus they thought long and hard about the things he said. Surely, by now they knew that his going, was part of the plan. Hadn't only a few days earlier he told them about going to prepare rooms for them in his father's house? Had he not just seemingly moments before prayed for them in their presence, "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

Jesus knows that he has communicated to this small assembly of faithful

people that which will be necessary to become what he intends for them to become. What he has always meant them to be. His body. His physical presence everywhere in the world. All that is left is another of the key things that must be done, and yet another reason why he has left them. He will send to them the Holy Spirit -- he will share with them another fundamental element of the faith. -- so that their transformation, their rebirth might be complete. So that out of this relationship with humanity begun in Abraham there might emerge for God, with God the union of God and people. The oneness of which Jesus speaks. Christ, the head, in heaven at the hand of the father. Holy spirit alive and well and empowering us to be his physical presence on earth in these disciples, and in you and in me -- as together, collectively -- we are the body of Christ, the physical manifestation of Christ, -- the church.

This is finally, why he, s single human being leaves. He cannot physically be everywhere, **but** he can be everywhere the church is, everywhere his body is. In all the places the church is **he** might help to heal the sick, and share the good news, and bind up the broken hearted. If we who have not been blessed to see Christ want to know what Christ looks like in the world today -- look around you! You are his body.

We, somehow, continue to wonder what it is that we are to be.... We keep waiting for further instructions... what he left us to do is really quite clear. Be him. Be Jesus. Do what he showed us how to do. Love as he taught us to love. And he gives us the HS to empower and guide us. We are called, like the disciples,

because we are disciples, to be his body in the world.

We are Christ's Body, gathering week by week, --physically gathered together, hearing scripture, praying, praising a Ruler who is far above all the powers and principalities, presidents and governments of this world, affirming our faith, hope and trust in the one who has gone to prepare a place for us.

We are Christ's body gathered to proclaim good news, to wash and welcome new members, dramatically acting out the meaning of Jesus' own dying and rising, with our arms we hold an infant as he would, blessing and bringing new life into the family of faith. With our words we welcome the stranger and the lost. By his instruction and invitation we gather at the table to be nourished in his body and blood. With our actions we show his love to those in need.

We are Christ's Body gathered to forgive sins and in that process to forgive one another -- proclaiming the deeply subversive Good News that changes everything: your sins are forgiven.

We are Christ's Body gathered to lovingly care for its sick and saddened members, recognizing Christ in them, and committing ourselves to minister to them, attempting to mirror, in our life together, God's own infinite compassion and mercy, touching and loving as Christ would touch and love.

We are Christ's body, charged with the responsibility to care for the poor, to seek justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with our God striving for a more honest and just and peace filled world.

We are Christ body, even when at death we gather to give witness to the

resurrection and to declare that loved ones place in the body of Christ even as they have achieved that place of rest.

We need no longer look up to heaven; The Body of Christ that is gone, is, in fact, right here. We are that Body, we are his own, and the fact that he is away from us physically matters not at all.

So, too, the final word, the final promise, that final element to remember is Jesus' own promise to all of us -- all of us who in his physical absence make up his body for the world -- to be with us always -- and to return to us.

In the meantime we do not stand looking heavenward in prolonged anticipation -- we are called to be bathed in the power of the Spirit on PENTECOST -- and to be the body of Christ. So we wait. We wait for the spirit to come to us. To empower us, to enliven and renew us. SO that once again we might be the church. It is worth waiting for. It won't be long now.