

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Year A

Acts 1:6-14

Psalms 68:1-10, 33-36

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

One wonders what it was like to be standing on that hill and watching Jesus disappear. Were the disciples filled with fear, or amazement, or mixed emotions? Were they standing there for a long time or was it just a few moments before the two men in white apparel spoke up? We will probably never know the answer to these questions. What we do know is that, after this experience, they went back into Jerusalem to wait, as Jesus had told them.

Who were these people who gathered in the upper room? In the next verse after our reading, we are told there were 120 people present. They were the core of the followers of Jesus, with a few new additions. Throughout His ministry, the gospels tell us that the brothers of Jesus were not followers. It is also unclear how connected Mary was to Jesus during this period. We do know that she was present at the crucifixion, but was she one of the followers – one of the women who were actively supporting His work? The presence of the other women is not surprising to me at all given their prominent role in the post-resurrection appearances. Together, they tried to understand the message Jesus had left them. What does this tell us that we should do?

Beyond prayer, I think it is safe to say that they were discussing all that Jesus had told them during the days and hours leading up to the crucifixion. In that time when they were gathered possibly in the same upper room with Jesus, He had told them many things – instruction about their need to carry on in the work He had begun. Together, they knew that Jesus had high expectations of what they would do. They were the beginning of what was to become the church. What was the path forward?

On that hilltop, they had to have realized that their great expectation of a political change was not going to happen the way they hoped. While their initial crush after the crucifixion had been calmed by the many appearances of Jesus, they had still hoped that the military victory would happen. Now, that was gone. So, they had to face what Jesus had said about the Kingdom of God of which they were to be a part. It was not a kingdom of power and might, but of love and inclusion. How was it to work?

We are still asking that same question 2000 years later. During the first half of the twentieth century, it seemed like the church was going to take over the world. If we built a building, people would flood in. That is not our experience anymore. It seems that the church was lost its way. It is no longer the dominant force in our nation. What does the Kingdom of God look like now? Like those early disciples, our hopes and dreams for the church are not being realized. How are we to go forward?

It is now time for us to face the same questions that those early followers of Jesus faced in that upper room. They did not know what was coming next and neither do we. However, Jesus has the same plan for us as He did for them.

First, we need to remember that the Kingdom of God is not about power. It is not about dominance. The one constant theme Jesus presented was that the Kingdom of God was about love – love of God, love of neighbors, and love of self. It is God's will that we show God's love to everyone – not just the people we like, but everyone. We are not expected to go it alone, but like the 70 Jesus sent out, we are to go in community. Jesus told them to take nothing with them, but to rely on what the people they met provided. We are to live in the present and not be overly concerned about things that are out of our control. Those are issues for God to handle. As I have said many times, the harvest is not our concern – we are to plant the seed and leave the harvest to God.

In verse 8 of our reading from Acts, Jesus instructs His followers to spread the message to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. He did not tell them to spread the word to the ends of the earth first, but to start locally and gradually expand to other areas. We are to follow that same path – start locally and then expand. That means we are to start here – within St. Matt's, spreading God's love to each other. We need to pray for one another. We need to lift each other up. We need to reach out to those who cannot be with us each week letting them know we care about them. Then, we can reach out to the people down the street, in our neighborhoods, in our community. God is already at work in this community – we just need to join in. By walking gently into the community, by listening to what those around us are saying to us, we can learn what God is doing and how we might walk along side as we show our love for all.