

7th Sunday of Easter, (Sunday After Ascension Day) 20th May 1012

Acts 1:15-17, 21-45

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people) and said, ¹⁶'Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus— ¹⁷for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.' ²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.' ²³So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.' ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

1 John 5:9-13

⁹If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. ¹⁰Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

John 17:6-19

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. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for 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. ⁹I 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. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And 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. ¹²While 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. ¹³But 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. ¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

We're now in the last Sunday of the Easter Season, the 7th Sunday, the Sunday After Ascension Day.

On Thursday we celebrated Ascension Day, Jesus ascending into heaven to be at God's right hand – in other words, given the full authority of Messiah and King with everything in heaven and earth subject to him. And as he left, he instructed his disciples – not just The Twelve – to wait in Jerusalem until they received, were “clothed with Power from on High.”

About 120 disciples, men and women, kept vigil in Jerusalem in that upper room, obviously, as we see from this reading today, dealing with some practical matters while they waited. It was 10 days of expectant waiting. What did Jesus mean, they would receive power from on High? **God's** power clearly, yet did they have any idea what it would mean in practical terms? Did they spend time hearing the Hebrew Scriptures read? Were they remembering the Old Testament scriptures about the Holy Spirit, about power from God and reading them again to the assembled group? Did they pray as they wondered what they meant? Did they have some sense of what was coming? Did they examine themselves again as to how to be prepared, cleansed from wrong attitudes and actions, to be clean, holy people dedicated to God, lives given completely to understanding that Jesus is Lord over their hearts, their minds, their commitment and their actions? Were they reframing their understanding of what Jesus meant over 'the Kingdom of God', the power of Jesus' resurrection, the forgiveness of sins through his death? They must have received teaching from Jesus at the times He appeared during the 40 days from His resurrection till His ascension. The only gospel record we have of that is the disciples walking to Emmaus in Luke 24, but I can't imagine it stopped with that!

The disciples had also received the Holy Spirit when Jesus appeared to them immediately after the resurrection, when he breathed on

them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' - the Comforter and Sustainer, the One who would lead them into all truth, and bring back to mind all that Jesus had taught them. What a 10 days of expectant waiting this must have been – preparation to receive this Power! Something *more* than they had already received!

However, to talk of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Power would be to steal the thunder of next week's celebration, the outpouring of the work of God demonstrating the power of the Easter season and the Resurrection!

During the 40 days, and while waiting in these 10 days between Ascension and Pentecost, there must have been a sense among them of looking for Jesus. And that expectancy is carried on for us each week in the opening sentences of the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Lord be with you!

And also with you!

That's an incredible blessing to give each other – that Jesus will be walking along life's road with us each step as we go!

And there's the alternative in Common Worship:

The Lord is here!

Just imagine the excitement during the 40 days when Jesus appeared to the disciples in various ways, at various times and to different numbers together. Imagine the rustle through the gathered people - the Lord is here! That wave of excitement as Jesus, their Lord and their God, visibly appeared to share time, teaching and meals together. What would they learn this time?

Yet after Jesus ascended into Heaven, no longer could they say, "The Lord is here!" as he visibly appeared. Yet they did say it – and the response shows us how. "His Spirit is with us!" Jesus himself told the disciples that His going would be a good thing for them, because the Holy Spirit would come!

As the sentences continue, we are encouraged to live in the blessings of His presence. “Lift up your hearts!”

Yes! “We lift them to the Lord!” Our hearts and our eyes look up; open to see his presence among us, the details of the hidden footprints and signs that he is here. And as we look up our horizons are enlarged!

Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit and pluck blackberries.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning in this sonnet has grasped that joy of seeing God in the everyday, the little things that fill us with the awe and wonder that make us, like Moses at the burning bush, willing to take off our shoes to worship.

Yes, we hear that joyful command, “Lift up your hearts,” and, in response, we lift them up to the Lord.

In that lifting up, our spirits are drawn to be glad when we hear, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God,” and cry out with the joyful response, “It is right to give thanks and praise!”

But maybe we can’t. Are we looking down, eyes on the floor because we’ve not seen the greater horizon? Are our eyes looking down because we’re afraid to look at the Lord who saves us? Are our eyes looking down because we’re weighed down with burdens? If that’s how we are, there’s no condemnation. We bring all that to the Lord, lift up our eyes and let Him take it all.

The Risen, Living Lord calls to us to rejoice that ***He is with us***, and calls us to raise our hearts in joy to his love, and to his authority and power at work within us, empowering us through that great power that raised Jesus from the dead and raised him to the heavenly places at God's right hand – so that we can ***will*** and ***do*** what is his good purpose for us here on earth.

Let's enter that time of expectant waiting, joining the first disciples as we wait for what our Lord has in store for us when we come to Him with open hearts. Amen!