

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JUNE 2, 2019**  
**ASCENSION SUNDAY**

**Litany**

Based on Psalm 97

There is only one monarch who deserves our highest praise, the Lord our God.

**Like lightning and fire, God's glory fills the world.**

We worship nothing less than this:

**The God that is above all ideas about God,  
the one who is always more than we imagine.**

Let us pray:

**Deliver us from the worship of the little gods that seek our devotion  
and turn us instead to the bedrock of all life in whom we live  
and move and have our being. Amen.**

**The Scripture**

Acts 1:1-11

*In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, 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."*

*So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 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."*

**The Message**  
***In Only a Few Days***  
**Nick Larson**

Listening to one of the best preachers that I know this week, Rev. Elizabeth Grasham, she referenced the 1936 seminal work, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* when Dale Carnegie wrote this about conflict, "There is only one way to get the best of an argument -- and that is to avoid it. Avoid it as you would rattlesnakes and earthquakes."

So, as she eloquently pointed out, it may be Dale Carnegie whose book has sold 15-million copies since 1936 (Can you believe that that book is *that* old?) that we can blame for our modern dialogical stalemates. For the shouting down of different perspectives.

It seems that everywhere I look these days, there is a strong aversion to arguments, particularly this mistaken view of arguments. Carnegie would be right if arguments were fights, which is how most of our culture sees them.

Dr. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, a professor of practical ethics at Duke University says, "Like physical fights, verbal fights can leave both sides bloodied...If you see conversations as a fight or competition, you can win by cheating as long as you don't get caught (or perhaps even if you do). Bad arguments become just as important as good ones. You can call their views silly, crazy, stupid, ridiculous, or just joke about how ignorant they are, how short they are, or how small their hands are. None of these things will help you understand them, their positions, or the issue that divides you, but they can help you win." Some kind of winning, I guess.

This view undermines reason and steals human dignity. It feels like he is describing the whole of social media.

The book of Acts opens with Jesus taking leave of the Apostles. The ascension of Jesus is a moment of deep loss and transition, as well as a moment of glory. I read Acts 1 with mixed emotions, reliving the grief of the apostles, as Jesus is taken from them, while waiting as it also points us forward to the power of the Spirit God is going to bring us.

Transitions are like arguments. if you wait around, they show up.

Transitions are a constant feature of our existence, but the transitions that involve losing and gaining people can be the most significant. We are often engaged in the back and forth between encounter and dismissal, greeting and farewell.

These in-between spaces can often be the hardest to navigate. This space between, Jesus ascending and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost leaves the apostles, and often all those of us stuck in as the TV show “Stranger Things” calls it, “the upside down.”

If I can say one thing definitively about our God, it is that our God is a good and holy God, who understands what it means to be in-between. Our God is not a God who is out there, but a God who comes close. Not a distant deity, but a relational savior. Our God is a crucified and resurrected God, one who spends forty days with his disciples, showing them convincing proofs, eating with them, and speaking of the reign of God.

This is a man, that understands that his friends are going to be a little lost without him and facing a new reality. This is a God who chooses to come close to those who stand outside of tombs. This is not a God who is far off that choppy breath, that falters between sobs. This is a God who is willing to show the scars in his hands to his friend who doubts him. This is a God who walks and talks and breaks bread with them until they recognize him.

This is a man, who understands that when his friends ask that seemingly old question, “Is now when you’re going to overthrow Rome and return to Israel to its former glory?” they are trying to win an argument. He doesn’t joke with them. He doesn’t make them feel small or ignorant. He certainly doesn’t set out to win against them.

Instead Jesus, the definitive revelation of God, sidesteps the argument of their question, to answer the one underneath it. He says, “Don’t worry about the timing, and WHEN God is going to restore the world, instead worry about the HOW.” Jesus says, God will do this through their, and our, witness to the work of the Holy Spirit in community. The power that is coming will go beyond the power of Rome reaching to the very ends of the earth.

In order to embrace their role as witness, the apostles will need to relinquish some of their expectations. They could not and should not expect to take the world by force or by winning arguments. The next steps of this early community, and honestly ours today, is involving openness and waiting for the Spirit to move, often without tangible success or a sense of assurance. A ministry in those days would have needed a huge stretch to include Gentiles, and it would have to include great boldness and faith. The Spirit moves in some rather unexpected directions and asks us to visit some unusual places, and as a result these apostles will be accused of turning the whole world upside down.

That’s where we are, Broadway. This is where we stand today. In-between. We stand in-between the leaving of one leader, and the calling of the next leader. We stand in-between the political right and the political left. We stand in-between the purely literal

interpretation of these stories and a purely metaphorical understanding. We stand in-between joy of a successful stewardship campaign and a gap in our diligently-prepared budget for our next fiscal year. We stand in-between Easter and Pentecost. We stand between school years and summer vacations. We stand in-between.

The growing polarization of our world can, to this extent, be traced to a failure to give, expect, and appreciate another location. The inherent location of in-between is by definition no longer where you were, and not yet where you are, and where you are going to end up.

Living this type of life is not easy. I can tell you from personal experience. Living in the in-between makes you brave and brokenhearted. In the in-between, our role is to rumble with the expectations, disappointments, confusion, resentments, heartbreak, connection, grief, forgiveness, compassion, and empathy. Yet, also with victories, joy, laughter, celebration!

Yet, the thing I want to point out to you, today, is that you can't do that if you are still moving.

Some of us try to run backwards to the place we were before the incident that pushes us into the in-between. Back peddling into the familiar can be a welcome place, even if it is collapsing around us.

Some of us try to run forwards, skipping the darkness of the moment all together, just trying to close our eyes and wish as if nothing was there to begin with.

My therapist says to me, the idea is that we must learn to make the most arduous journey in life, which is the connection between our head and our heart. It sounds simple, but it's way easier said than done.

The problem is most of us want to skip over the journey. We make up excuses to try to take away the hard part. We say, "change can be good." Dismissing the problem. We say, "We'll be fine." Ignoring the hard reality, we say, "I'm over that," shoving our emotions down deep. We say, "Substitute it for someone/something else," trying to replace our losses.

So often, we try to skip the in-between.

Yet, if we take seriously the biblical narrative, the best thing to do during the in-between is to wait. Jesus instructs his disciples, in Acts, to wait in Jerusalem for 40 days, and he stays with them showing them convincing signs that it was him.

So, when we are facing the unknown, the unexpected, the loss of an important relationship or community... When we are waiting on that new word from God about where the Spirit is to go next, we need to learn to wait, and listen. To watch for the signs.

As a parent, the hardest thing I've ever must do was wait with one of my children when they experience loss or heartbreak. I wish to God that I could often pull them out of that endless sobbing or wailing. To stop the ripples of anger as they melt into shaking or sobbing.

Yet, if I try to take it away, I actually end up robbing them of their power. Instead, I have to try to provide comfort through the ache or frustration. I have to let them get out their cleansing tears, and I have to show them I, too, have known struggle. And I have to support them as they go through the emotional moment. There is no short cut, no side way out.

Jesus seems to know this, and say instead to his disciples, the *WHEN* of the coming reign of God is less important than the *HOW*. God will bring the transformation of the world through small and simple acts. Through acts of kindness and generosity, through acts of compassion and empathy. Through acts of silence and contemplation. Through acts of presence and perseverance.

This is why he promises power with the Holy Spirit. Power and transformation come through connection to the divine. Yet, sometimes, we find ourselves in the in-between. In the disconnection between the was and not yet.

In Scripture, when these moments of in-between happen, the communities of faith learn to wait and discern together, to be guided in their conflicts and through the unknown because they listen to God. They find their unity not in agreement or in victory of arguments but in unity of the Spirit. Recognizing the spark of God inside of the one they would disagree with.

One of the points of wisdom that arose for me out of the story in Acts, chapter 1, is the idea that too often we want to run ahead, and not take only a few days, to sit and listen to Christ. To sit and appreciate that while we are in-between, we can learn a lot about ourselves, and others, and their perspectives.

We can encounter true community through vulnerability. We can witness the power of God already churning underneath whatever it is that we are in the midst of in our lives.

And after you've sat carefully in the in-between, then we should hear the way this story transitions to the birth of the church.

As the disciples watch Jesus while he was going (ascending into the fullness of the reign of God), they are caught gazing upward toward heaven, when suddenly two men in white robes, like the ones Mary Magdalene saw in the tomb when the two male disciples saw only laundry, asked them, “Why do you stand looking up towards heaven?”

Really, they are saying, there is something better to witness to. Look around you, get moving towards your new-found future. Now that you’ve listened for the wisdom of God, get going.

Follow the Spirit, head to Galilee, claim the promises of Jesus, move towards a better future where the reign of God will be complete.

Explore where God’s Spirit is going to emerge a new, both locally, regionally, and everywhere. Witness the Spirit in Jerusalem, in Galilee, and to the very ends of the earth.

Broadway, this is your challenge as well, as we have sat in the in-between for almost ten months now. So, let us look with new eyes upon this in-between.

Let us look not towards heaven, but at each other eye to eye. Let us look into the faces of those suffering from floods and tornados. Let us look with new eyes upon those whom we disagree, so that we might understand that often we have more in common than we think. Let us look into the faces of children to which we partner with the Early Childhood Learning Center, so they might know the love of God. Let us look into the faces of the young people who will enter into the waters of baptism next Sunday, so they might feel God’s holy transforming desires for their lives. Let us look into the details of budgets and finances, so we might see how the Spirit will move there.

If we sit staring up into heaven looking for Jesus, then we cannot be God’s witnesses to the very ends of the earth. So, let us give our attention to those around us, who are in need of knowing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Amen?

**Amen!**