

*Ascension of Our Lord*

May 13, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke. (Luke 24: 44-53)

[Jesus said to the eleven and those with them,] “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

A number of years ago, my family was returning home from vacation. We'd left our hotel and waited for the shuttle, and waited in line at the incredibly slow American Airlines desk, and waited in line for passport control, and waited in line for security. And now we only had one more wait – to get on the plane. Or so we thought.

Just before boarding, the announcement came over the speakers: “This flight is overbooked. We are looking for a couple of volunteers to take the next flight to Charlotte. And we will compensate you with a free flight anywhere American flies.” And nobody moved. So they tried again. “We're looking for a couple of volunteers to take the next flight to Charlotte. If no one volunteers, we will randomly have to choose three people to stay.” Everybody looked around. Everybody was like looking at the odds in their heads. Nobody moved. “We will now have to randomly choose three names.” And, of course, one of those names was Matthew Bullock. My son, Matthew, was ten at the time. So we went up to the ticket desk, and we said, “You know, you chose a kid. We can't leave him here.”

And the ticket agent said, “Yes, you can. And one of you can stay here with him. That would be another one of our three. So we don’t really care what you’re going to do, but he can’t get on the plane.” So we rearranged flights. And Brian and Matt stayed in Mexico, and Kimberly and I went to Charlotte. They waited in Mexico; we waited in Charlotte. We finally got on the last flight out of the evening, which was, of course, delayed. Ah, the joys of traveling and waiting.

Traveling is great. Waiting – not so much. Let’s face it. Nobody likes to wait. We send mail instantly online. We eat our food fast. We import fruits and vegetables from all over the world so we don’t have to wait for the right season. We use GPS to avoid waiting in traffic. We can’t believe it takes a week to get medical tests back, or months for surgeries or for injuries to heal. And today we’re just itching for the weather to get right so we can get to the cabin, or get in the garden, or get out of school. It’s so close, but not yet. We Hate To Wait.

And so, of course, the last thing that Jesus says to his disciples before he disappears forever from their sight is “wait.” As the era of the incarnation ends, as the new era of God’s power and spirit begins, Jesus says, “Wait.” In Luke we hear, “*Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*” Or, in Acts, we read, “*He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father.*” Jesus said, “Wait.” NOOOOOOO! I don’t want to wait. I don’t want to wait. I want to get out there and save the world. Hasn’t it been long enough?

According to the Book of Acts, it was forty days between the morning of Easter until the ascension. Forty days of wonder and proofs. Forty days of reconciling and forgiving. Forty days of learning scripture and what it all meant. Forty days. And as I mentioned on Wednesday night at our devotions, forty is this beautiful, mystical length of time. It is, throughout the scriptures, the length of time that it takes God to prepare for something new.

When Noah was on the ark, it rained for forty days and forty nights. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness forty years. Goliath taunted Israel for forty days before David showed up with his sling. Saul reigned for forty years. David reigned for forty years. Solomon reigned for - -

RESPONSE: “Forty years.”

- - forty years. Nineveh was threatened with destruction in forty days if they didn’t repent. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days. We celebrate Lent each year for forty days.

Gail Ramshaw puts it this way:

“Forty is a long time. But forty is also mythically alive, a time pregnant with a religious future. Forty is how long we must wait for God’s intent to be realized. Forty is the metaphysical delay which

all humans experience, the legendary period of hope. It often takes forty to open the door.”<sup>1</sup>

It’s been forty days. It’s time now for God to open the door. But to what? The disciples are standing there, not knowing what’s next. They don’t know what will happen when Jesus leaves them. Will it all fall apart? Will they screw it up? Will it all end? Or will God do something new and strange and wonderful? It’s time. It’s forty. And now Jesus is going away.

And the only instruction Jesus gives them is “wait.” “*Wait in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*” Wait for God’s power to come among you. The power of heaven. Power. The Greek word is “dunamis,” from which we get our word “dynamite,” or “dynamic.” This is power for change. Power for bringing life and healing. Power to create a new reality. God’s power. A power that is life-changing, world-changing. But it is not fast. Nothing good ever is.

And so we wait. We wait for the power from on high. And we wonder what’s next. We wonder what will happen in God’s time. Will it all fall apart? Will we screw it up? Will it all end? Or will God do something new and strange and wonderful? We are waiting in the in between time for God to open the door.

And it’s awkward to wait. It’s awkward to sit in the unknown. We want to have a say in what goes on. We want to be in charge. We want it done my way, in my time. This in-between is uncomfortable. We get confused. We disagree about what we should be doing. We can’t see the way in front of us. It’s hard to wait for God.

But this is not our power from on high. It is not for us to save the world. It is not for us to have all the answers, or run it all ourselves, or be in control. This is God’s world, and we are living into God’s future. And God knows what God is doing. It’s our job in this in-between time to live in faith and humility. To listen and watch for the coming of the Spirit, however and wherever that spirit comes. It is our job to learn about what God has done in the past and know the ways of God, so we can see them when they come. To be ready when God calls. To open ourselves up to the new and strange and wonderful things God might do in our midst. To serve the one who is making all things new.

I have a story. Two weeks ago, Kathryn Tiede was here to preach. She’s from LSS. And you may not know it, but it took us two years to get her into this pulpit. Our schedule changed, her schedule changed. The last time we had to schedule six months out. I was so looking forward to finally having her here to bring the stories of LSS.

But a week before she was supposed to come, I get an email from a Jerry Hoffman, that said, “Hi. I’m a board member from LSS, and I’m going to be taking Kathryn’s place next week because she can’t come.” It had been two years!

---

<sup>1</sup> Gail Ramshaw, “Christ Both There and Here”, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2016-04/may-5-ascension-lord>, Accessed 5-1-2018.

I flipped out a bit. “What do you mean she can’t come?” I don’t even know who this guy is who’s supposed to come now.

When I calmed down, I went online to find out about this Reverend Hoffman. But, to be honest, he had a great resume. And I noticed that he had worked with several churches and non-profits in restructuring their council leadership. Just like we’re trying to do here at Immanuel. I called him. I said, “Can you work with boards and councils to help them function better?” And he said, “Yeah, I work with all kinds of boards and the seminary, and I do workshops.” And I said, “Can we meet for a cup of coffee?” Two days later I get an email from Kathryn Tiede. “Things worked out. I can come now.”

Was it not the Holy Spirit making that connection?

But that’s not the end of it. Kathryn did come. And she preached and she told stories about Safe House, the youth shelter that’s less than a mile from here. Afterward, as she leaving, she ran into Kim Thompson in the parking lot. And Kim asked if there were a lot of churches helping them with meals, because they provide a late dinner for these kids every night. And Kathryn said, “Well, no, not really. Very few churches bring us meals.” And Kim said, “Well, you know, we have dinner here every Wednesday night, and there is always more than we need. And we could feed the six kids that are at Safe House on Wednesday night or Thursday night.” Immanuel is now in charge of Thursday night at Safe House. Kim came to me last week and said, “I’ll get volunteers for this summer, when we don’t have Wednesday dinners. Is that okay?”

Is that okay? Is this not the power of God, leading us into connections for our future and resources and ministry that we have no idea we could do? This is seeing the power of God for love and connection working among us.

It is God’s power that will work in us and through us. We are a part of God’s amazing work in this world. It is God that brings new life and new opportunity. It is God who is bringing God’s reign fully into this world.

And so we wait, wait and watch, because someday soon you will be filled with the power from on high.

Amen.