

**Sunday, May 24, 2020 – Seventh Sunday of Easter**  
**“Waiting in Faith”**

Acts 1: 12-16

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Adapted from CPR

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

Okay, you take Jerusalem and you take Judea and you take Samaria... I'll cover the rest of the earth! Ready? Break!

Well, it doesn't quite work that way, does it? Not hardly. Nevertheless, it must have seemed overwhelming to the disciples to hear those orders from Jesus. So overwhelming they just stood there gazing up into the sky. I don't know about you, but I picture all eleven looking intently up into the sky with mouths wide open – not because they were so amazed at Jesus' ascension (they had witnessed some amazing feats already), but because he just gave them a tall order! So transfixed were the disciples on that cloud in the sky that it took a couple of angels to snap them out of it. And now, what's the first thing they did after the King of glory returned to his throne in heaven? They went to Jerusalem, gathered the faithful women, and prayed.

What do you think they prayed for? I'm sure they prayed for an increase of faith. I'm sure they prayed for courage and wisdom. I'm sure they prayed for patience. Perhaps, as they began to process the daunting task set before them, they found comfort in Jesus' promise. They found themselves waiting in faith for the promised Spirit of truth, for they had a message of hope to share with the world! They did not know that they only had a week to go until the Spirit coming at Pentecost and as we are all too painfully aware right now, waiting with uncertainty of what is coming next is hard.

Here is *not* what happened with the disciples. They did *not* privatize their faith. They did not include the word *polarized* in their mission statement. They did not stay in that Upper Room, praying among themselves. They did not try to build a monopoly around Jesus.

Here's what did happen. They let their faith be known in such a bold way that all were martyred (except John, who was sent in exile). They suffered for the faith. They preached compassion for all people since it is for all people that Christ died. And yes, they joined together to pray in that Upper Room, but they didn't stay there. They left to pray among the people and

carry the message of Christ's victory to all nations. And no, it wasn't a monopoly on the truth – it was a mission in the truth.

There are dangers in waiting. Keep in mind what Jesus is telling his followers. Although he is being taken from their physical sight, they will not remain without comfort and guidance— comfort and guidance will come through the Holy Spirit. We know then where the Lord left his disciples after ascending on high and where he left the church: in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. And we know where he leaves us for these remaining days here on earth. He has left us with the order of salvation now fulfilled. So then, do we stand gazing into the clouds like the disciples were caught doing at first? Or, do we follow what they did next? The dangers are that we do the following:

Number one: Waste opportunities by never leaving the Upper Room. We know the disciples fled back to the room they'd borrowed for the Passover Meal on what we now call Maundy Thursday after Jesus' arrest. Easter evening, even after they've heard reports that Jesus was risen, we find them locked away for fear of being subjected to the same treatment of Jesus. And more incredibly they're up there again the following Sunday, a week after Jesus first visited them after the resurrection! Would you believe it, that's where we find them yet again on the day of the Ascension, 40 days after Easter, six and a half weeks after the Passover?! Our homes are a safe anchor and shelter – this is why we were asked to stay home for Nevada. So too our church home – but the plan is to be equipped here to be dispatched out there. The disciples choose another but not to hold down the fort! "One of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

Which brings us to the second point – we're not here as a member's only clubhouse. I'm encouraged that what has happened in our streaming services continues a positive trend from our in-person services. Even before this shutdown on an average week – that is to say, not a day when we had school kids singing or a holiday with a lot of guests – in an average week one out of every eight people worshipping at any given service wasn't an official "member" of our congregation. Our metrics, comments and likes show a continuance of that trend. Worship is a place where Jesus comes to the people, and our ability to keep connecting, including and being built into Christian community with each other with a posture of sincere welcoming remains

critical moving forward – so for all our newer worshippers both near and far – we’re glad you’re here, welcome and with us and we want to keep building a connection with you.

The third potential danger is that we forget we’re all on the same team. Consider Paul’s admonishment to the church in Corinth: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Cor 1:10).

One of the things the coronavirus has done is exacerbate existing tensions between people – whether it’s at your family, at work, in church, politics or international relations. Whatever your problems looked like before, now you get the funhouse mirror effect, everything is exaggerated. It all boils down to impacts of fear and anxiety. The longer this drags down, the lower our creativity. Our ability to reason drops. We actually lose IQ points under stress, all of which bodes poorly for handling conflict in a healthy way.

If you missed my letter that was emailed on Friday I encourage you to look for it, it was reposted to our social media accounts. In the letter I explain that we were going to continue online worship for this week and using these same words from Paul I make a plea for our continued patience and unity. The letter is a kind of supplement to this particular point in the sermon – the mission of Jesus is too important to be sidetracked by disunity over start dates for in-person worship services our personal opinions about the COVID response, whether of the various levels of government, our church body or our church and school.

Meanwhile, through it all, we wait for deliverance. It starts with what God has already done – you’ve been called by the Gospel and adopted into God’s family in baptism. That delivers you from sin, death and hell. Because of that you know that ultimately, you will prevail.

All of which gets me thinking about what deliverance looks like practically in the age of COVID. Admiral James Stockdale is best known for two things. Later in life he was running mate to third party presidential candidate Ross Perot. But before that he, like John McCain, spent seven years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, enduring brutal conditions and torture at the hands of his captors. When Stockdale was being interviewed by an author for a business book he was asked about his POW experience. Stockdale said, “I never lost faith in the end of the

story... I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade.”

Then the interviewer asked, “Who didn’t make it out?” “Oh, that’s easy,” he said. “The optimist

“The optimists? I don’t understand,” I said, now completely confused, given what he’d said a hundred meters earlier.

“The optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, ‘We’re going to be out by Christmas.’ And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they’d say, ‘We’re going to be out by Easter.’ And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart... this is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

Our hope springs not from government officials, or elections, or entering a new phase, or our financial circumstances, or even the discovery of a vaccine. It springs from what God has done and the joy the Holy Spirit puts within us to share our hope in Christ – to share the reason for our hope with the world.

The disciples were united, and we pray for that same unity of purpose. It’s truly amazing what can be accomplished when everyone is heading in the same direction with purpose. We have the Good News that he died on the cross for every one of our sins and rose again that one day we will be with him – hope for the future and joy for today. What hope fills our hearts, and what joy to share this hope with a broken and hurting world! In Jesus’ name, Amen.