

WAITING FOR THE WIND

A sermon preached by the Reverend Anne Gavin Ritchie, Ascension Sunday 2018.

Today we are hearing the readings for *Ascension Day*, which directly set us up for Pentecost next Sunday, the empowering of the Church for *mission*.

Ascension Day used to be far more emphasized in the church's calendar. When I was in high school, we were exempted from the first two classes because Ascension was honored as a "holy day of obligation." My buddy Jan and I would go to early morning Eucharist, but not miss going to our own personal "communion" at Riesterer's German Bakery. Yum.

Why has the Ascension lost so much attention? Probably, in scholarly terms, because it is seen as explaining Jesus' presence at "God's right hand." For early evangelists and then the framers of the Nicene Creed, with their ancient cosmology, Jesus had to leave *here* to get *there*. Most biblical scholars today understand this credal proclamation and the story that supports it as a kind of theological poetry, conveying a deeper truth: Jesus has ascended beyond the limits of time and space.

For me, the ambiguity feels more *emotional*. The disciples – women included – had already lost their mentor and friend with his death on the cross. Then Jesus was back. He could appear to the couple walking from Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus. He appeared in the upper room, behind locked doors. He offered his friends breakfast on the beach in Galilee.

But now he was gone again, a *second* loss. Jesus reassures them as he is parted from them, but the disciples can't possibly understand what they are being asked to wait *for*. Luke's description of the promise differs slightly between his Gospel and his account of the Acts of the Apostles:

"Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

No wonder they are standing there, dumbfounded, wondering what to do next. They need a little help from the messengers in white, who challenge them,

“Why do you stand looking up to heaven?” In other words, “Get *going!* Do what the Teacher told you! Wait with joy until the Spirit comes!” According to Luke’s *Gospel* story, they do just that.

There are all kinds of ways to wait. We can wait with impatience and occasional frustration. *I* tend to fall into this category. “What’s *taking* so long?” “Why is the road so backed up?” You might call this the “are we there yet?” type of waiting. It’s really quite unpleasant, both for the frustrated person and anyone around her. Or him.

There is also a kind of waiting that is really a kind of giving up, a resignation. “What will happen will happen.” “Don’t ask *me* to do anything about it.” “It’s not *my* problem.” Here the person tries to *remove* him-or-herself from the *ambiguity* of waiting. It’s an *escape* from the emotional and spiritual *demands* of waiting.

But there is another possibility. You might call it *faithful* waiting. We acknowledge the difficulties of not knowing exactly what the future holds. We may occasionally feel frustration. But we *don’t* try to escape from the reality of not knowing. Instead we choose to embrace the *present moment*.

That’s what Luke’s *Gospel* says of the disciples after Jesus’ ascension: “they returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.” They chose to respond to their waiting by blessing God and one another. Even so, this doesn’t mean that they weren’t at times confused and afraid.

The great theologian Paul Tillich puts it this way:

“But, although waiting is not having, it is also *having*. The fact that we wait for something shows that in some way we already *possess* it.” “If we wait in hope and patience, the power of that for which we wait is already effective *within* us.”

There was a ten-year-old boy who was playing video games with his aunt and badly beating her. She begged for some respite from the games and went to sit down to rest. But the little boy was restless and looked for something to do. He looked over and saw his Batman kite, which he hadn't had a chance to fly in a long time.

"Aunt Alice, want to fly my kite with me?" She looked outside and didn't see any breezes. "I don't think there's enough wind to fly it."

"I bet *I* can make it fly!" He ran out and started running up and down, up and down, but the kite just stayed shoulder-high. After ten minute of running, he finally came back into the house.

His aunt asked him, "Well, how did it go?" He answered, "I got it to fly some." But as he walked away to return the kite to its shelf she heard him say, under his breath: "I guess I'll have to wait for the wind."

We all have to "wait for the wind." It may be delayed; it may not come the way we expect. Sometimes it comes through surprising voices.

But the "Wind," the Holy Spirit's amazing presence and power *will* come. It will break through our impatient hearts to remind us just how much God loves us. It will break through our complacency to empower us to love one another.

It will empower us to pick up the pieces of our broken hearts and *live* with blessing and with joy.