

Sunday, May 17, 2026
Seventh Sunday of Easter (Year A)
Acts 1.6-14
The Rev. Michael K. Fincher

“What’s the Holdup?”

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Once again, the disciples find themselves in an “in-between” time. An in-between time that we share as part of our journey through Eastertide, as we approach Pentecost in just one week’s time. The disciples have been here before. Sort of. Following Jesus’ death on Good Friday, they experienced the in-between time of waiting for the resurrection Jesus had foretold. Now, six weeks later, they are back in another, a different, in-between time. Only now, it is the time between the Risen Christ’s Ascension into heaven and the Day of Pentecost. A time of waiting for the promised sending of the Holy Spirit upon them. Unlike the first in-between time, between Good Friday and Easter, this one is qualitatively different. And, as we shall see, has a very different purpose.

To help see this, let’s briefly return to that time between Good Friday and Easter. That agonizing time in which the disciples’ world had been turned upside down. They were waiting for Jesus to return, to be raised from the dead as he had foretold on multiple occasions (Mt 16.21, 17.22-23, 20.17-19). Although, given the surprise and even the disbelief they exhibited when Jesus was raised and began making post-resurrection appearances, it becomes pretty obvious that waiting for that moment was not really first and foremost on their minds. Which is to be expected, as they were experiencing profound grief, which likely completely overshadowed any sense of waiting—if they even recalled what Jesus had previously told them about being raised. They were too busy trying to process the events of the previous few days, too busy mourning the loss of their friend and teacher, to think about much else; to anticipate what would come next. At least in any meaningful way. And besides, the in-between time happened so quickly: a matter of a couple of days between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning.

This time, things are very different. The in-between time the disciples find themselves in now is much longer. Although, as of yet, they just don’t know how long. The Ascension occurred forty days after the Resurrection. For us, that fortieth day was this past Thursday. Pentecost would not occur until the fiftieth day after the Resurrection. So, the disciples are in for ten days of waiting. Waiting, anticipating, God sending the Holy Spirit to be with them. That much, they did know.

Immediately before today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus orders the disciples “not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father”—referring to his earlier promise to them that after his departure, God would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. A promise he initially made in his Farewell Discourse on Maundy Thursday, the day before his execution, and referenced in our Gospel reading for last Sunday. In the previous section of Acts, Jesus goes on to say, “This 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” (Acts 1.4-5). Reiterating the promise. And this time, giving them a sense of timing. “Not many days from now.”

Although, I have always wondered . . . why the delay? By my reckoning, 43 days before his Ascension, Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. And it will be another ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost. Since the sending of the Holy Spirit had already been planned, had already been announced, why not send the Spirit immediately? Surely, upon Jesus’ arrival in heaven, the Holy Spirit could be dispatched. It’s not like there needed to be an order placed and processed, like an Amazon order. It’s not like the Holy Spirit would be on back order. It’s not like there would be supply chain issues: “We’re sorry, the Holy Spirit is on a cargo ship off the Port of Long Beach.”

I mean, why would the Holy Spirit not be sent right away? After all, the whole Jesus Movement is on hold until the Holy Spirit arrives. There is work to be done. Lots of it. Let’s get on with it! As Jesus tells the disciples right before he ascends to heaven, “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.” Certainly implying that once the Holy Spirit comes, the disciples will have what they need to get on with the work Jesus began in his earthly ministry. That they will be his “witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth.” That they will be tasked with extending his message far beyond the area he had been confined to during his three-year public ministry. That the only way his work would expand, the only way the Church would be built, would be through the disciples, energized and empowered by the Holy Spirit. So again I ask, what’s the holdup?

Perhaps the explanation can be found in what happens during the actual Ascension and what immediately follows. “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.’” In my mind’s eye, I imagine the disciples standing there, mouths gaping, perhaps a few hands extended, as if trying to catch a hold of Jesus’ leg before he ascends too far out of reach. All the while, many undoubtedly thinking, if not actually verbalizing, “Wait, where are you going? You just got back.”

Unlike the in-between time from Good Friday to Easter, which was a veritable blink of an eye and a time in which they were occupied with profound grief, not to mention fear for their own lives, that the temple authorities or the Romans might come for them next, here, they had likely settled into a comfortable routine with their Risen Lord. He had been with them these last forty days, continuing to teach them, guide them, preparing them for what was to come next. Aside from the fact that Jesus would pop in and out unexpected, at times, and aside from the ever-present wounds of the crucifixion, it was just like old times. They had Jesus back. Why not just continue on, as things had been before the whole messy Passion in Jerusalem?

Therein lies the rub. The delay in sending the Holy Spirit has absolutely nothing to do with the Spirit’s availability, and everything to do with the disciples’ ability to move on to the next step. While we do not have any reference to it, the disciples likely are experiencing some semblance

of grief at the second loss of their friend and teacher in six weeks. Even if Jesus had been working with them to prepare them for what comes next and for their part in the ongoing mission and ministry of preparing for God's kingdom; even if Jesus had assured them that they would have what they needed through the promised Holy Spirit; even if Jesus had assured them that they would not be alone in their work; they still had to process the very human feelings and emotions they were experiencing at the once-again loss of Jesus' physical presence with them.

Plus, they needed to figure out for themselves just how they might be able to do what Jesus had commanded them to do: to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." To figure out how these remaining disciples could live into what it means to become the Body of Christ in the world. After all, lacking Jesus' physical earthly presence among them, with the end of his post-resurrection appearances, his presence will now be experienced in the gathered community of faith, the Body of Christ, which will receive its strength and power from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit as yet to be sent.

Part of moving into this place of experiencing God in new ways and of becoming the Body of Christ in the world meant figuring out the logistics of doing what Jesus had commanded them to do. Up until now, Jesus had figured everything out. Jesus had told them what needed to be done. Now, they needed to do that for themselves. Which is one of the things we know they did do during this in-between time. The remainder of the first chapter of Acts, the intervening twelve verses before the account of the Pentecost event, records two specific actions the disciples took to prepare themselves for living into what Jesus commanded them. First, we are told that Peter rises up as the de facto leader of the disciples. Jesus had already indicated that Peter would have a position of leadership. Before foretelling his death and resurrection the first time, Jesus declared, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church . . . I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Mt 16.18-19). While Jesus considered him to be one of the "inner circle" during his earthly ministry, following the Ascension, Peter fully steps into that leadership role. His first action is to call for the replacement of Judas, who had committed suicide following his betrayal of Jesus. Seeking to round out and provide for a full leadership team of apostles as they prepared to continue Jesus' work in the world. As we are told, following the process he laid out, Matthias was selected for the ministry of apostle.

I would venture that part of this process, this planning and strategizing they engaged in, also entailed the coming to terms with the need for humility in the work they were doing. That, no matter how much they planned, how much they staffed up, how much they organized, they would always need to remember that they needed God's help. That the only way this ragtag band of fishermen and laborers would be able to pull off such an audacious plan as laid out by Jesus, was to be willing and open to relying on something far greater than themselves. That they need to be willing and open to asking for and receiving God's help. To be willing and open to receiving the Holy Spirit, which would energize, empower, guide, and support them in the work that had been entrusted to them.

With all this work done, the organizational as well as the personal processing, the disciples are able to prepare and position themselves and the budding community of faith for receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The event we will celebrate next Sunday.

It would be easy to view this in-between time as belonging to the disciples alone, at least with respect to the work needing to be done in anticipation of Pentecost. Even though we live in the post-Pentecost era where the Holy Spirit is active in the life of the Church and in our own lives of faith, we can still benefit from this in-between time. I invite each of us to view this time between Ascension and Pentecost as a time of reflection and an opportunity to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit anew in our lives. To consider how we may not always be as open or receptive as we could be to how the Holy Spirit operates in our own lives of faith, or even in our own parish community. To consider how we might position ourselves to more fully benefit from what the Holy Spirit offers us as an ongoing source of motivation, guidance, and power in our lives of faith. That come Pentecost, we—individually and as a community—might be supercharged by the Holy Spirit, preparing us to fulfill Jesus' command to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Or, at least, our little corner of it.

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