

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ - risen.

For a good part of the last three plus years, I have spent a great deal of time talking about how our perspectives effect our perceptions, and how our perceptions effect our interactions with others most notably in emulating Jesus' example and call to love and serve others. The second most important thing I have talked about is finding our way to love and trust God, to believe God's promises, and to have faith in God and Jesus.

You might remember that two weeks ago I spoke about death not being the end but the beginning, that for God and Jesus there is a **presumption** that death is followed by resurrection, which is followed by ascension. In fact, I used this quote from Karoline Lewis that said, "*The resurrection presumes that there is something even beyond itself, the ascension.*"

Then Pastor Chris last week also made some passing comments about the ascension occurring the coming Thursday, or Thursday of this past week. He also mentioned the ascension is traditionally celebrated on the fortieth day of Easter also known as Ascension Thursday or Holy Thursday. Ten days later, on the fiftieth day of Easter is Pentecost which we will celebrate next Sunday.

Two weeks ago, I also pointed to ways the stories of Stephen and Jesus were similar. In that vein, I want you to hear a statement by Liz Rossing in her God Pause devotional on our gospel reading for today. She said, "*Jesus prepares the disciples for a time when Jesus is no longer with them. Jesus is counting on them – and us – to continue Jesus' mission.*" I know you do not want to hear this but that is exactly my goal today and next week. To prepare you to carry on the mission and ministry we have created together with the help of God. Why is this important? First, you and I know that stress from life changes is not limited to negative events because positive transitions also create stress. Second, Pastor Lesley will soon arrive to help relieve whatever stress you gain and to point you toward a future with a newly called pastor. You may or may not fall in love with her like you fell in love with Pastor Krueger or Nanette and I. But you should listen to her and weigh all of her suggestions against your model of ministry and decide what fits and does not fit. Finally because faith is the ultimate answer to stress, you should know that stress tends to increase with fear – fear of failure, fear of success, fear of loneliness, fear of change itself. God says over and over in the Bible; fear not, have no fear, do not be afraid, and simply - trust God.

Have you heard of or seen psychological studies that correlate and even score life changes that create stress. I recently looked at one study that identified ten high impact events and five notable others. It summed them up by saying stress is created by changing identities, midlife transition, relocation, and, if you will, divorce or relationship changes. This time in your lives, the life of KLC, and Nanette's and my lives is fraught with change and, therefore, stress. We can mitigate this stress by trusting God, trusting each other, and by focusing on what God is calling us to do. The *Our Daily Bread* devotional for today quotes from Jeremiah 17:7, "**Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.**" The writer of this devotional goes on to talk about the value of deep roots noted when many trees survived the California wildfires because of their roots, while buildings and cars did not. My friends, as we go forward after next week, we need to individually and collectively trust God and each other, to love each other, to forgive each other and ourselves, and to serve God, each other, and the world around us.

The Sundays and Seasons introduction to our first reading from Acts says, "Today's reading is part of the introduction to the narrative of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. These verses tell of the risen Lord's conversation with the disciples on the eve of the ascension, in which Jesus promises that they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit." Do you realize that that promise is a promise to you as well? If not, then I am telling you that it is as much your promise as it was their promise. So, grab hold of it, trust it, and move forward with firm steps.

The verses that caught my attention were verses 10 and 11 that say, "**While Jesus 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?'**" My friends do not get caught staring off into space. Do not slow down. Keep believing. Keep trusting. Keep **servicing**. And then remember, works do not produce your salvation, but rather your salvation produces works done in **joyful** response to the grace, love, and mercy of God.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus' prayer at this time of the narrative is done alone, off in a secluded location while the disciples slept. But that is not true here in this reading from John. Jesus is right in the midst of them, praying for the world and for them. Have you ever had someone pray out loud for you in their presence? How did you respond? What kind of effect did that have on you? I have had that experience many times but the most profound and powerful was my ordination when my wife, maybe ten pastors, and a bishop laid their hands on me in prayer. It was, my friends, life changing.

The other important thing that comes out of this gospel reading is that Jesus gives a simple definition or explanation of eternal life in verse 3 that says, “**And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God.**” Karoline Lewis in her commentary on this reading asks how many times we have heard this depiction of eternal life? Her answer was rarely if at all. Can anyone tell me what word I often use that might be suggesting the same type of meaning for eternal life? Yes – relationship.

In the last verse of our gospel reading, Jesus says, “**I am no longer in the world.**” Lindsey Scott in her commentary on this gospel reading recalls the scene from the Disney movie *The Lion King* where Rafiki has Simba looking at Simba’s reflection in a pool of water, Simba does eventually recognize his father in his own reflection. Rafiki says, “*You see? He lives in you.*” Far be it for me to challenge Jesus but if we believe - then God, Jesus lives in us, God lives in you. How about them apples?

Hear then the Good News:

Jesus is no longer in the world – maybe.

The incarnation is over.

Death is overcome.

The resurrection has come and gone.

The ascension also has come and gone. Do you notice a pattern here?

Every action of God seems to pre-suppose that there is **something** to follow.

There are **no** endings, just new beginnings.

Can that, does that change **your** perspective on life as we know it?

We are in the world. Jesus’ work is in our hands.

Jesus is counting on us to be the presence of God in this world.

What does that look like? I do not know for sure, why?

First, it is different for each of us.

Second, it is not easy but it **is** important.

Grace and peace to you my friends, this week – be God’s presence in the world.

**Amen**