

**7 Easter – Year A – June 5, 2011**  
**Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10,33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11**  
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I distinctly remember the opening of the first big theme park in England. I was just a kid, so it was the most interesting and exciting news I heard all that year. The feature attraction was the first corkscrew rollercoaster, which was a full three hundred and sixty degree thrill ride. I could hardly wait to try it. Of course, a three-sixty loop rollercoaster is probably the bare minimum for a theme park ride these days, but then it was a totally new experience. Most of us have strong feelings about roller coasters: generally, we either love them or hate them. Even if we don't like roller coasters there are plenty of tamer rides in fun parks, but they generally have one thing in common: movement.

The account of Jesus' ascension into heaven is absolutely amazing. It's definitely one of those "did you just see what I just saw?" Kodak type moments. No wonder the disciples just stood and stared into the sky until two mysterious white robed men bring them back to earth. The point being, it's no use just gazing into heaven, when there's work to be done here and now. Jesus has just promised the gift of the Holy Spirit, but there is no definite timeline for the fulfillment of that promise. This divine gift will empower the disciples to be Jesus' "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Note the entirely personal nature of Jesus' commission to His disciples. It's not just to be witnesses, but Jesus says we are to be His witnesses. The Good News is not something to do, or try we can achieve by ourselves; it is a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. The coming of the Holy Spirit is God's gift that we'll celebrate next week on the Day of Pentecost. In the meantime, we really only have one option available to us. Even as we witness God's movement in Jesus' ascension into heaven, and wait in eager anticipation for God's act in sending the empowering Holy Spirit, all we can do is live each moment. If we were kids, it would be like trying to wait patiently to try out that new three-sixty rollercoaster ride. Even as adults, we have a hard time waiting. Just look around you next time you're at the supermarket checkout when there's more than two people in line! The frustration is usually palpable. Author and Biblical scholar, William H. Willimon, describes it this way, "Waiting, an onerous burden for us computerized and technically impatient moderns who live in an age of instant everything, is one of those tough tasks of the church. Our waiting implies that the things which need doing in the world are beyond our ability to accomplish solely by our own effort.... Some other empowerment is needed, therefore the church waits and prays." Karl Barth also designated the time between the ascension and the Day of Pentecost as a "significant pause" between the mighty acts of God, in which the church's task is to wait and pray.

Our world is a constant stream of motion, and if we're honest with ourselves most of us really enjoy being close to the action, at least some of the time. It's another one of those love-hate relationships. We're social creatures at heart, and we like to be out and about, although the crowds or the traffic are frustrating at times. When I was about eight years old, I was really sick. Apart from the short walk to the bathroom, for more than a week I was confined to bed with scarlet fever. In hindsight, it was awful being stuck in bed, even for just those few days. Anyone who's had mono or any serious illness will know what I mean and some. Our freedom is very important to us. We can feel the air moving in and out of our lungs as we breathe. We feel our hearts pumping blood through our bodies. We blink, we fidget, we tap our toes to the music, we dance, we walk, we run, we yawn and stretch, as if to continually prove we're alive. Our bodies are in motion all the time. No wonder the church is known as the Body of Christ. We are in constant inspired motion, as the living embodiment of divine reconciliation.

As Christ's body in the world, our purposeful movement means that we must pursue purposeful listening. Without discernment, we're just doing our own thing, or just following someone else's random directions. The news has been full of a great example of the latter. Despite the numerous warnings throughout Scripture, including the one in today's reading from Acts that only God knows the times for His

movement and actions in world history, there are still those who think they know better. Harold Camping's highly publicized proclamation of the end of the world on May 21<sup>st</sup> of this year is just the latest in a series of human power trips, which give us a front row view of what a lack of discernment looks like. Unfortunately, people like Camping give Christianity a bad name, because they misuse their power, and lead others into foolishness as well. Perhaps the only thing that Camping has right is that community does play an essential role in the life of the church. It's not enough to go it alone. The disciples gather and stay together, praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit to empower them for the movement of the Gospel from Jew to gentile, and from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

To be baptized with the Holy Spirit is to receive power to be Christ's witnesses. You and I are the embodiment of Jesus' life-giving presence on earth. Our challenge is to continue to pray for discernment to understand what that means individually, and as a community of faith. The kingdom of God is constantly coming and becoming in the world. It is a divine spiritual movement, stirring our hearts and turning us towards God, and more. It is social and political movement, embracing divine justice and compassion through the world's power structures. Yet, it is even more. The kingdom of God is the constant movement of the Holy Spirit, transforming individuals, communities, whole societies, the entire world, into a new reality, a new way of living, where God's will is done on earth, as it is in heaven. As Barclay says, this transformative movement towards the consummation of God's kingdom is "founded on love, not power."

The apostles thought it was time for Jesus to use His power to restore Israel. Instead, Jesus ascends into heaven, and God gives us the continuing ministry of reconciliation. There is no limit to God's abundant love and grace. We are witnesses to the fact that the love of God is moving in and through this community of faith. We continue to pray for God's guidance and blessing as we plan our capital fundraising campaign. The money will enable us to build an extension to our current facility to better accommodate our own needs, and to open doors to the needs of the broader community. In the meantime, your vestry has prayerfully approved the proposed improvements to Polycarp Hall. You'll start to see these changes in July or August. We're eagerly anticipating the movement of the Holy Spirit, helping us to grow and welcome new members, helping us to expand our own freedom in Christ, to broaden and deepen our relationships with God in Christ Jesus, and with our neighbors. After much prayerful discernment, we're in a time of activity and growth here at Our Saviour. What's more, God is already blessing us, answering our prayers, and our purposeful waiting. Just this week, we received two gifts for the Capital Development Fund totally \$13,000. As always, God's timing is perfect, and I hope that we will all be giving thanks to God for these gifts. This is a time for continued prayer. A time to pray for a three hundred and sixty degree vision of God's love and abundance. A time to pray that God's will is done in this community. A time to pray and listen for God's word to each of us about how we can make that happen. A time for purposeful prayer as we ask for the life-giving Holy Spirit to bless us with even greater passion and energy, creativity and generosity. A time to pray in earnest for the fulfillment of God's transformative movement so that we can all continue to grow in our personal and community witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Will you pray with me now? Almighty and everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; direct and empower us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.