

## Acts 1:1-11

**1** In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.<sup>3</sup> After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> While staying<sup>[a]</sup> with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with<sup>[b]</sup> the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But 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.” <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> 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.”

May God bless is our understanding the words that we hear today.

Before moving to Greenbelt Michael and I had the pleasure of living on the Space Coast of Florida, a stone’s throw away from Kennedy Space Center, or in the jargon of the area “The Cape.” We lived there long enough to see the last set of shuttle flights launch and return and the continuing launches of the smaller rockets that are sent up with satellite equipment, supplies to the space station and “top secret” missions. Sometimes we were lucky enough to be at the cape for a launch but more often we just headed to one of the beaches by our house, where we would sit or stand on the shoreline and face north.

We were never alone, always joined by the faithful whom I called “rocket heads”, who would wander onto the beach much like us, face north and wait for the inevitable burst of light and smoke that

signals a successful launch. On a clear day, the vehicle can be traced for a long time, but soon enough the rumble of the engines has come and gone, and the last of the contrail has disappeared into distance. There are always a few who continued to stand, mouth slightly agape, eyes strained upward, necks craning to catch just one last glimpse as the rocket ascends into the heavens. Soon an almost audible sigh goes up from the gathering as people realized that the rocket really is gone and that they have been standing there for several minutes looking just a little bit foolish with their mouths open staring into space. One by one the rocket heads leave, the quickly formed camaraderie just as quickly dissolves as people move back to their ordinary lives.

Every time that I read the ascension story now the memory of these launches come back to me and I couldn't help wonder if we rocket heads didn't look just a little bit like the gathered disciples at the ascension, mouth agape, necks craned and eyes straining to catch that last vision of their beloved friend as he moved from this existence into the next.

Will you pray with me please? May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O Lord. Our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

We don't talk about the Ascension very much, probably because it is a little hard to understand...but hey! Aren't we the people of the virgin birth and resurrection? We don't necessarily understand how those things happened either, but they are part of our faith story just as the Ascension is part of our faith story.

I admit I don't get all caught up in the semantics of the Ascension; there are people out there who spend way too much time trying to figure out HOW this happened...did Jesus lift slowly into the air on a cloud or kind of blast off like a rocket? How far up did he have to go before he got to heaven and what did he do when the atmosphere ran out? This inevitably leads to the conversations of when is he going to come again and if he comes like he left what will that look like?

It may be very un-theological of me, but you know what? I don't think that's the point. It's enough for me to know that he will come again, If Jesus says not to stress the details that is good enough for me, but the fact remains that the story of the ascension was told and we are given the opportunity to hear about this event which means that it is important and we need to figure out what the point of the story is for us here and now.

For me, the point is found in the words of the messengers, the angels, the men in white robes who were suddenly found in the

midst of the disciples who ask them. “Why are you standing here?”

This last Sunday of the Easter season is an opportunity for us to push the pause button and give ourselves some breathing space before we jump into the next big thing. We have had an emotional couple of weeks, happy parades, brutal death and a mind blowing resurrection, it's hard to believe that anything more spectacular could possibly happen and yet, today is a reminder that more big things are indeed coming.

I sometimes wonder if our big faith celebrations like Christmas and Easter make it too easy for us to hang around the stable and the empty tomb. It is so lovely to rest awhile in these fabulous examples of God's love for us that we sometimes over look the rest of the story. We forget that we need to go forward. We have got to collect ourselves and move away from the stable, move away from the empty tomb...move along, there is nothing to see here. This last Sunday of Easter gives us the hint that we are coming up to the first Sunday of something new and wonderful...

It might be a little hard to see in between the clouds and the angels an emotional good bye, and a promise, but what our gospel writer is asking us to understand is that power is being passed today, the story is changing, and it is no longer the story of what

Jesus did in his earthly ministry. Now it is the story of Gods people who have been equipped to carry on the message and to **do** ministry. Now it is our story. Now it is our ministry. Now it is the ministry of the church! Now we have to hear the question of the angels with our own ears, we need to hear the question of the angels for ourselves. And what is that question? Why are we standing here?

Why are we standing here when there is so much good news to share? We have a message for the world! Christ is Risen, he is risen indeed. His work was to reconcile us with God and we have the opportunity and the responsibility to share that good news with a world that needs to hear of the grace and the love that is open to us all no matter who we are or where we are on our journey of faith.

Why are we standing here when there is so much work yet to be done? We come here to worship, yes, but when we leave we should be leaving to serve. I firmly believe that the church of the future is not going to be played out in Sanctuary's on Sunday morning; I believe that the future of the church is going to be played out as it should be, in serving those whom we are called to serve in the world and we can't do that if we are standing here.

And that is where our Ascension Deficit disorder comes in...we hear the charge but we get distracted....oh look! A Squirrel! We can't seem to keep our thoughts and our actions on the simple task that Jesus set out before us.

Again and again in his ministry, Jesus told his disciples then, tells his disciples now exactly what we are suppose to be doing in this world, exactly what we need to do to make sure that the reign of God is happening right here and right now. The good news is that it is not some crazy complicated formula, it is breathtakingly simple. Love God, love your neighbor. Love God with all your heart, mind and soul; Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Knowing how simple it is, why are we standing here? We will not get a world of justice and mercy and peace if we think that all that is required of us is spending one or two hours on a Sunday morning in a building. We need to be active, we need to be fully engaged in the world, we have to stop depending on others to take care of the hungry and the sick and the poor, the homeless, the un employed and the underemployed .We cannot depend on others to treat people with respect, to share a kind word to visit the homebound or write a letter to someone in jail. We cannot depend on others to do the work that Christ has called us to and we cannot assume that they will do our work for us.

Our children showed us this morning, it is hard to pass our love along when we are standing in one place. The best way, to spread the love around is to get moving, in and among the people that we want and need to share God's amazing love with. We cannot change the whole world, but we can change the world for our neighbors. We can decide today that we will no longer be a silent majority and we will lift our voices and our votes in support of those who support equality in all areas of life. We can continue marching on Washington, we can continue to find tangible ways to offer support to those in need, we can continue to be the church in the best way possible. Make no mistake, there is much to do and the ministry is hard, but the power has been passed on to us so church I ask you. Why are we standing here? HA