

Pastor Jon's Sermon from May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

## Memorial Day Weekend

Blessed Memorial Day Weekend to you all. This is a time to remember all the saints and sinners who have gone before us... especially those who have served our country and who now who rest from their labors.

Memorial Day was always a big day for my grandparents... Grandpa Bert and Grandma Ruth Strasman. As a kid, they would pick me up and take me to the cemetery to help water the flowers on all our family graves. I got to run to the spigot and fill the watering can for Grandma so she could water the red geraniums. But the best part was stopping at Dairy Queen on the way home. I couldn't wait to get my ice cream. To this day, I still love Dairy Queen and red geraniums... because they both remind me of my grandparents. In addition, my Grandma on my mom's side, Flory, served in the WAC, Women's Air Core and my Grandpa Bert Strasman served in the army in WWII and was a liberator of the Dachau Concentration Camp in Germany. So thank you to all those who served and are serving our country.

Today, I want to talk about "waiting" as a discipline of our faith. Many of us are tired of waiting for things to open up again. If you think about it, Christians are always waiting... for Jesus to return. We live in the delay of the Parousia... in the already but not yet. As Jesus says, No one knows when he will return... only the Father knows. So how do we wait with purpose?

First of all, how good are you at waiting? Most of us would say, "not very good." But this pandemic is teaching us how to wait. Would you agree? It has thrown a wrench into all of our plans lately. We have had to change behaviors... which is never comfortable. You many have had to change: travel plans, work plans, wedding plans, graduation plans, funeral plans, worship plans, elective surgery plans, haircut plans, family plans, and even grocery shopping plans. Waiting is no fun.

In our first lesson for today, Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to come. This is on the day of His ascension. In the

church year, we are getting close to Pentecost Sunday next week. Pentecost means 50... 50 days after Easter. This is when the Holy Spirit came to the disciples, as advertised, and moved them out from a place of fear and anxiety in a locked room into the world to be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth.

The disciples were used to waiting after the resurrection. They were sheltering in place, if you will, with each other, out of fear of the same fate as Jesus faced on the cross. Jesus often found them in locked rooms during his resurrection appearances. They were anxious and uncertain about what the future held. After Jesus rose from the dead on Easter, he hung around earth for 40 days. And even though Jesus gave them specific instructions on what to do after he was gone, the disciples holed up.

On the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Easter, Jesus ascended into heaven to be at the right hand of the Father. In our lesson for today the disciples just stood and stared up to heaven as Jesus disappeared into the sky. Two angels appeared and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to 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 other words, "Don't just stand there looking up."

So they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and gathered in an upper room. And they waited. They waited 10 whole days before the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. Prior to Covid-19, I couldn't have imagined waiting in a house for 10 days, much less two months now. While they waited, Luke tells us they were constantly devoting themselves to prayer. Prayer is a good way to wait for the Lord.

The disciples were waiting to be clothed with power on high that would make them witnesses to Jesus resurrection to the ends of the earth... starting in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. This message was to be for all people, even enemies of the Jews, the Samaritans. Keep in mind these were ordinary fisherman, tax collectors, and mostly uneducated people. I would ask Jesus, "When we receive this power, what are we to do with it?"

The problem the angels had with the disciples is they just stood there gawking as Jesus ascended out of sight. Maybe they were wondering, so now what do we do? “The one we love and follow is gone. I guess we should just stand here.” The church has a no gawking rule. We aren’t to just stand around, and be idle, we have work to do... not for our salvation, but in response to the grace we have received in Christ. Jesus wants his followers to be witnesses to our faith daily. The challenge is how can we witness to our Christian faith with a mask on or at physical distance?

This week in the Wednesday zoom Bible Study, I wondered out loud how we could make our Food Pantry available to people. I think Pam Garmen suggested St. Joe’s was open. Ken Schmidt got on the phone after the study and called St. Joe’s in Menasha and asked if they needed food. They said yes. So this week, our food pantry, that has been so well organized by Chris and Sarah Swender, has been emptied out by Chris and will go to hungry mouths that need it. Ken’s response is we can always restock it. This was a witness to me that we are following the Spirit and letting go.

The Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us. You received the Spirit in your baptism. Yes, it is easy to get discouraged and anxious right now, but we have hope. As baptized children of God, know that our fears and anxieties were nailed to the cross. Our first Peter lesson says, “Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran Pastor during Nazi Germany, and resistor to Hitler says in a devotion, “Jesus alone is the Lord of fear; it knows him as its Lord and yields to him alone. Therefore, look to him in your fear.”

The Holy Spirit will lead us through this pandemic. We will gather again as a community. In the meantime, we shall wait with faith and purpose. Amen.