

MAY 24, 2020  
SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
17:1-11

ACTS 1:6-14; JOHN

WELL, DEAR FRIENDS. . .

HERE WE ARE, NEARING THE END OF OUR 'LITURGICAL' EASTER  
SEASON,  
EVEN AS WE, NORMALLY, BEGIN OUR 'SUMMER',  
RECREATIONAL SEASON IN MICHIGAN. (pause)

IN ADDITION, WE CALL TO MIND THAT THIS PAST THURSDAY

- WAS ASCENSION THURSDAY.

WE ALSO CELEBRATE THIS SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

WITH THE ANTICIPATION

OF CELEBRATING PENTECOST NEXT SUNDAY!! (pause) WHEW!!

IF ALL OF THAT IS NOT CONFUSING ENOUGH. . .

WE ALSO ARE IN THE MIDST OF THIS GLOBAL PANDEMIC. . .

WE ARE SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A COMPLETE QUARANTINE

AND A GRADUAL RE-OPENING. . .

TO WHAT EVER A 'NEW NORMAL' LIFE MIGHT BE!

ADDING TO THE ENTIRE SCENARIO

ARE THE MANY VOICES WE HEAR

ADVOCATING FOR MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD. . .

IN OUR OWN STATE OF MICHIGAN

AND THROUGHOUT OUR UNITED STATES.

WHERE IS THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE VALUE OF LIFE

AND CONCERNS REGARDING ECONOMIC STABILITY? (pause)

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

PERHAPS ONE OF THE WAYS TO DESCRIBE OUR CURRENT SITUATION

IS THAT WE ARE DEFINITELY IN AN '**IN-BETWEEN**' TIME!!

OUR BIG QUESTION IS

HOW ARE WE CALLED TO LIVE IN THIS

IN-BETWEEN TIME?

TO BEGIN TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION,  
LET'S FIRST TAKE A LOOK AT THE ASCENSION.

WE SELDOM HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY  
TO WORSHIP TOGETHER ON ASCENSION THURSDAY  
BECAUSE IT COMES DURING THE WEEK.

BUT WE DO REMEMBER THAT IT WAS ON ASCENSION DAY

- THAT JESUS LEFT THIS EARTH
- TO RETURN TO HIS FATHER. (pause)

THE APOSTLES WERE DUMBFUNDED WHEN JESUS ASCENDED!!

- NOW WHAT WERE THEY TO DO??

THEIR RESPONSE WAS ACTUALLY A PRETTY TYPICAL RESPONSE:  
THEY RAN AND HID!!

JESUS TOLD THEM THAT HE WOULD SEND ANOTHER ADVOCATE

- BUT THEY REALLY DIDN'T HAVE ANY IDEA
- WHAT THAT REALLY MEANT!!

THEY WERE IN AN IN-BETWEEN TIME –

- NOT REALLY KNOWING WHAT TO DO!!

WE FIND OURSELVES IN A STRANGE IN-BETWEEN TIME,  
NOT REALLY KNOWING WHAT TO DO  
AS WE MOVE THROUGH THIS PANDEMIC.

THIS SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE EASTER SEASON,  
WHICH WE CELEBRATE TODAY,  
IS ACTUALLY AN IN-BETWEEN SUNDAY ALSO. . .

WE GATHER AFTER THE ASCENSION...

- BUT BEFORE THE FESTIVAL OF PENTECOST
- WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SENT TO US
- TO STRENGTHEN, GUIDE AND PROTECT US
- AS WE STRIVE TO BE THE PEOPLE OF GOD. . .
- AS WE ARE THE CHURCH!! (pause)

AS WE GATHER TOGETHER TODAY

- WE CELEBRATE *BOTH AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING.*
- ANOTHER IN-BETWEEN TIME.

THE ASCENSION IS, OF COURSE, AN ENDING.

- JESUS WILL NO LONGER WALK THE ROAD OF THIS EARTH.

AND YET...

- IT IS THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER STORY—
- THE STORY OF THE CHURCH.

GOD SENDS HIS SPIRIT TO BE WITH US

- SO THAT WE CAN BE CHURCH!!

AS WE PREPARE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF PENTECOST -  
THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH -

- WE TAKE SOME TIME TO REFLECT ON
- HOW WE ARE GIVEN THE HOLY SPIRIT
- THAT WE MIGHT BE CHURCH -
- THE PEOPLE OF GOD TOGETHER.

WE ARE CHURCH AS THE PEOPLE OF OUR LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

- WE PRAY TOGETHER,
- SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER,
- SERVE OTHERS FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL,
- AND PROCLAIM THE GRACE, LOVE AND MERCY OF JESUS FOR ALL

WE ARE ALSO ALL A PART OF A GREATER CHURCH. . .

- THE CHURCH OF GOD
- GATHERED AS THE NORTHWEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD,  
AND WE ARE CHURCH AS THE ELCA.

WE ARE CHURCH, WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER,  
WE ARE CHURCH FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD!

SO HERE WE ARE MY FRIENDS!  
IN ANOTHER - IN-BETWEEN TIME. . .

WHAT DO WE DO?

WE HAVE BEEN "HIDDEN AWAY" FOR OVER TWO MONTHS -  
SCARED, ANXIOUS, GRIEVING LOST LOVED ONES,  
WONDERING HOW WE WILL SURVIVE ECONOMICALLY,  
WONDERING WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BRING!

WILL WE EVER BE ABLE TO WORSHIP TOGETHER IN PERSON?

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AS WE OPEN UP —  
OUR STATE AND OUR CHURCHES?

WILL WE BE FAITHFUL TO SOCIAL DISTANCING?  
WILL THERE BE ANOTHER WAVE OF THE VIRUS  
THAT WILL AGAIN TAKE LIVES FROM US?  
PERHAPS EVEN OUR OWN LIFE?

JUST AS THE APOSTLES WERE DUMB-FOUNDED  
AND DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO WHEN JESUS LEFT THEM,  
WE FIND OURSELVES IN THE SAME FRAME OF MIND!

WHEN THE APOSTLES WONDERED WHAT TO DO  
JESUS ASSURED THEM THAT THEY WOULD RECEIVE POWER  
FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT,  
AND THAT THEY WOULD BE JESUS' WITNESSES  
TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH!

JESUS HAS GIVEN US THE SAME PROMISE  
THAT HIS SPIRIT IS WITH US,  
AND THAT WE WILL BE STRENGTHENED  
FOR THE DAYS AHEAD.

JUST AS THE APOSTLES DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO PRAYER  
WE, TOO, ARE TO BE PEOPLE OF PRAYER  
AND TRUST THAT GOD IS WITH US -  
AND WILL GUIDE OUR STEPS IN TO THE FUTURE.

IN OUR GOSPEL LESSON TODAY,  
WE HEAR JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER TO HIS FATHER:

JESUS PRAYS:  
"HOLY FATHER,  
PROTECT THEM IN YOUR NAME THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN ME,  
SO THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, AS WE ARE ONE."

JESUS IS WITH US, BEGGING THE FATHER'S PROTECTION FOR US,  
CALLING US TO UNITY IN HIM.

WE ARE LIVING IN AN IN-BETWEEN TIME.  
WHAT WILL OUR FUTURE LOOK LIKE  
AFTER THIS PANDEMIC?

WHAT WILL THE NEW NORMAL BE?  
TRUTH BE TOLD,  
WE ARE ALWAYS LIVING IN AN IN-BETWEEN TIME!!!

WE LIVE BETWEEN BIRTH AND DEATH ALWAYS!  
WE LIVE BETWEEN TIME AND ETERNITY ALWAYS!

THE LIVING IN SIMPLY IN DIFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE ASSURANCE THAT WE ALWAYS HAVE  
IN ALL OUR IN-BETWEEN TIMES,  
IN THIS STRANGE IN-BETWEEN TIME  
IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES,  
IS THAT JESUS IS WITH US.

AS WE COME TO THE END OF OUR EASTER SEASON,  
WE ARE ASSURED THAT WE ARE AN EASTER PEOPLE!  
WE LIVE IN THE PROMISES OF THE RISEN SAVIOR!

NOTHING — NOT EVEN A PANDEMIC -  
CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

JESUS SENDS HIS SPIRIT TO BE WITH US  
EACH AND EVERY DAY  
IN EACH AND EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OF OUR LIVES.

SO TODAY,  
LET US TAKE A DEEP BREATH.  
LET US BREATHE IN THE SPIRIT OF JESUS. . .

LET US TRUST JESUS.  
LET US BE THE CHURCH TOGETHER. . .  
IN WHATEVER OUR 'NEW' NORMAL WILL BE...

AND LET US REMEMBER THAT JESUS IS WITH US,  
SEEKING OUR UNITY,  
EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE! AMEN!!

