

Easter 7 Sermon

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John 17:1-11, 1Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11, Acts 1:6-14

A few days ago (May 21st) we celebrated the feast of the Ascension, which happened 40 days after Jesus' resurrection. The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke all end with the ascension. The Acts of the apostles begins with the ascension. However, St John ends with the testimony of Jesus comforting his disciples to the end.

Today's reading from John 17 does not focus on the ascension. Rather, the text focuses on Jesus' high priestly prayer, which actually begins in chapter 13 and seems to end in chapter 17. I said "seems to end" because as our advocate and mediator, Jesus' high priestly prayer still continues as a way of interceding on our behalf even right now.

Notice that our text from John 17 describes Jesus' action of "looking up to heaven". Jesus looked to the place where he would be going at his ascension and he advocated on behalf of those whom he referred to as little children. However, before he mediated on our behalf, he prayed God's blessings on himself. He needed that extra empowerment due to his impending passion. In interceding on our behalf, Jesus asked that God would grant his followers eternal life. What is that eternal life? Jesus explains that that eternal life is "that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent".

This knowledge of God is not an academic, esoteric, other worldly knowledge, but is a personal experience, a close walk, having real life experiences with God the Three in One. We come to an intimate knowledge of God by learning more about him, being ware of his presence and communicating with him.

The apostles had had that special relationship with Jesus who revealed the Father to them. Jesus had interpreted scripture to them, even after his resurrection. He taught them how to exercise faith and he disclosed his soteriological work (work of salvation) and his Christology (personhood) to them. He contextualized love for God and love for humanity, simplicity, the discipline of prayer, fasting and deep devotion to God and a myriad of other disciplines. Now it was time for Jesus to make his exit which was really a reentry into his former position, presence, and being.

Our exit from this world is through death. Jesus' exit from this world was through ascension of his resurrected body. The first chapter of the Acts of the

Apostles describes Jesus being lifted up and engulfed into a cloud. St Mathew describes Jesus on the assigned mountain, giving his disciples the great commission to go make disciples, baptize, teach. Matthew leaves us to assume that the ascension happened after that. St Mark describes Jesus ascending into heaven where he 'sat at the right hand of God'. St Luke's description is more vivid and carries with it a kind of anamnesis. St Luke states, "*lifting up his hands he blessed them. **While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them.***"

Jesus' hands in the posture of blessing while exiting physical form is the image we want imprinted on our minds forever. This imagery reminds us that he is always blessing us, the church.

May our response to Jesus' benediction be like that of the disciples. 'They worshipped him... and they were continually in the temple blessing God'. See Jesus' hand blessing you as an individual right now. See his hand blessing the church. See Jesus' hand blessing those impacted in one way or the other by this novel virus. Take and own Jesus' blessing and you will feel his presence filling you and covering you. He more than a weighted blanket because he goes with you everywhere. He is omnipresent!