

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**C: Ascension Sunday (Easter 7)**

**Acts 1:1-11. Psalm 47, Ephesians 1:15-23. Luke 24:44-53**

**29 May 2022  
Salem, Bridgeport**

**“Will the World Ever Change?”**

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 10 people (mostly black) were killed in a mass murder at a supermarket in Buffalo, NY.

A mere 10 days later, 21 people (mostly children) were killed

in a mass murder at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

A mass shooting is defined as an incident in which 4 or more people other than the shooter are shot or killed.

So far this year there have been over 200 mass shootings in our country.

A pastor posted on Facebook that he started putting a lament into the Sunday morning liturgy

and his practice was to keep it there for four weeks and then take it out.

But he said that time and time again before he gets around to taking it out, something else happens

and he wondered whether we should just make a lament a part of our regular Sunday liturgy.

The trouble with that is that it normalizes these horrific massacres and murders.

I'm been reading a novel about a small town in Germany in the 1600s

where there's fear and hate and accusations and manipulation and torture and executions

and a total lack of justice or mercy or kindness.

The story is full of the injustice and brutality and violence of the time period,

and yet as I read the book I was feeling like we haven't progressed too far

from those days of superstition and hate mongering.

The surface details have changed of course and the tactics and weapons may be a bit more sophisticated

but the deeper issues are still there.

And that thought can leave us confused, hopeless and depressed.

As I read today's first lesson from Acts 1, it struck me that sometimes we may feel like those disciples

who are standing there and looking up to an empty sky, wondering where Jesus has gone.

But as I continued to read, I realized the power of these Ascension texts.

As the disciples stand there gazing up into the empty sky wondering where Jesus has gone,

two men say, “Why are you standing around? Jesus hasn't vanished forever; Jesus will return.”

And that was probably just what they needed to hear to remind them of Jesus' last words to them.

When they had asked Jesus if it was finally time for him to usher in that kingdom he was always talking about,

Jesus did not answer directly, but instead said,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; & you will be my witnesses

in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”.

And that was enough to shake them from their frozen positions staring up into the empty sky.

<sup>52</sup>“And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy;

<sup>53</sup>and they were continually in the temple blessing God.”

For me, those words were helpful but not quite enough to get me out of that feeling of numbness and paralysis, standing around staring up into an empty sky wondering where Jesus was.

And then I read the second lesson and that's where I found hope.

In the last half of our reading from Ephesians 1:15-23 today, Paul writes, “<sup>20</sup>God put power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

<sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,

and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

<sup>22</sup>And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church,

<sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

I'd like us to just think about that for a few moments.

When Jesus ascended into heaven it means that Jesus gave up the limitations of his earthly form and returned to be one with the God who is above all rule and authority and dominion that exists here in our world.

Not only does God the Creator have that absolutely unlimited power, that power exists also within Jesus who is the head, or the brain, or the control center of his new physical body which is the church.

And when as parts of the body we submit to Christ's rule, we become empowered by God to carry out whatever it is that Jesus commands.

Just sit with that image for a moment.

Jesus returns to God who is the Source of All That Is, the God of absolute unlimited power and Jesus who is one with God has that same power & is the head of that spiritual church which is his body.

Now please note that we are not talking about the organized institutional church here, or about any particular congregation or denomination; we are talking about the spiritual Church that we step out of anytime we disobey God, and that we step into anytime we obey.

And at those times when we are listening to our head, Jesus, and carrying out his instructions we are empowered to do absolutely amazing things.

And what are those amazing things?

The first part of Paul's letter points to that:

“<sup>17</sup>I pray that ... God ... may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, <sup>18</sup>so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power....”

So let me just point some of the treasures in this passage.

First, as we come to know God on a deeper level, as our relationship becomes increasingly intimate, as we grow in trust and obedience,

God promises to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

By its very definition, revelation is not something we can obtain on our own; rather it is knowledge that only God can reveal to us.

And in a similar way, the wisdom mentioned here is not the kind of ordinary, everyday wisdom we might gain from knowledge enhanced by experience, but rather it is the spiritual wisdom that comes as a gift of the Spirit.

So the first thing that comes out of our following the instructions of our head, Jesus, is that we receive the gifts of wisdom and revelation.

Why?

To illumine our hearts.

This is important because it demonstrates that the wisdom and revelation that we receive are not things that stop in our heads, but things that reach our hearts.

Revelation, you see, must do more than give us intellectual understanding; it must effect our emotions.

In other words, it's not enough to *think about* God, we must *feel something for* God.

It's not enough to have an intellectual faith; it must affect us emotionally in order to transform our hearts.

So the first thing that this passage promises is wisdom and relation for our minds and the second thing it promises is the transformation of our hearts.

And once it reaches our hearts, then an additional three gifts are unlocked:

The first is that of hope, i.e., “the hope to which God has called you”.

That means that when we are listening to God and obeying God, when we have received wisdom and revelation, and when our hearts have been transformed, then we will not only be able to understand where God is calling us but we will be able to feel hope that God is moving us towards our destination, our destiny, our purpose, our mission, even when to our natural eyes things seem hopeless.

That was evident at the Council of Churches’ meeting with author Jemar Tisby last Thursday where what struck me most was

that despite all of his knowledge about the atrocities of racism thru out these past 400 years and despite all of the racism he experiences every day of his life, he exuded an amazing sense of hope. So hope is the first gift Paul mentions.

The second gift is found in Paul’s next words, “the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints”.

And who are “the saints”?

Those other members of that spiritual Church who are also listening to and obeying God, those other parts of the one body of Christ.

So if you just imagine a group of Christians who have each submitted their will to God, received revelation in their minds, had their hearts transformed, and who are clear on their purpose and filled with hope, then you can imagine how much God would be able to do through an entire group of diverse and dedicated people who have many and varied gifts.

So the first gift of hope is about the clarity of the vision or destination of our journey, and the second gift is about the riches that reside in those whom God has given to us as traveling companions along the way.

And finally the third gift according to Paul is, “the immeasurable greatness of his power”, or in other words, access to Christ’s power which provides the fuel for the journey.

Now God does not give us that power first and then allow us to decide how to use it; rather God calls us to do something, and we agree to do it, then God empowers us for that work.

It doesn’t matter how huge or overwhelming the task and it doesn’t matter how small and insufficient our human abilities, if God calls us to do something, God will empower us to do it.

So in other words, no matter what awful things happen in our world, no matter how confused or helpless or hopeless we may feel to change the world, no matter how alone we may feel, no matter how we may find ourselves staring up at the sky wondering where Jesus has gone, Jesus has not left us alone or comfortless or powerless.

Jesus is not here in his physical body anymore but instead has been given back his glorious divine nature, and God has sent the Spirit to connect us to the Divine, and called us to step into the spiritual Church which is Christ’s new body in the world.

All we have to do is follow where Christ leads, and the Spirit will provide us with revelation for our minds and illumination for our hearts which allow us to receive 3 gifts: hope in the form of a vision of the promised land to which God calls us, riches that come through the traveling companions God provides, and power to fuel our journey.

With hope from God, with traveling companions in the body of Christ, and with the power of the Spirit, we do not have to stand around while the world continues to spin out of control.

Instead we can open ourselves to God’s call, submit ourselves to God’s will & commit ourselves to God’s work in doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

If we all help out, maybe God can change the world after all. **Amen**