

Ascension Sunday B The Rev. Dr. F. Darcy Williams @ Emmanuel Chestertown
Readings: Acts 1:1-11 Ps 93 Ephesians 1:15-23

16 May, 2021
Luke 24:44-53

It is not often that we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord on a Sunday at Emmanuel. In a normal year, we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension with a service of Evensong sung by our choir. Of course, in what we longing call a “normal year” our choir is present every Sunday from the Sunday after Labor Day in September until Trinity Sunday in the late spring. I am sure that you, as well as I, look forward to the day when the talented choristers of Emmanuel fill these chairs and lead us in song. I stand here today to tell you that the time is coming – if vaccination programs continue to be successful, and the community at large continues to practice healthy habits of hand-washing and staying home when sick, many of the things we call normal life will soon be possible.

I don’t need to tell you how challenging these past 14 months have been. We have been a community of faith, together and yet apart. Precautions taken to mitigate the effects of infection with the virus that causes COVID-19 changed the way we interacted with each other in everyday life, and the ways we came together to pray and share in our common life as members of the body of Christ. But those same precautions have helped keep us safe, made us more aware of what is important, and given us new insights into our responsibilities as followers of Jesus.

During his 33 short years on this earth, Jesus taught through words and actions the importance of family, of relationships, and of caring for others. His every action served an example of living God’s Way of Love, of living the life God called us to live when God created humankind in God’s own image and likeness.

During the 40 days following his resurrection from the dead, Jesus continued to walk the way of truth, to be the light in the darkness, and to support his disciples as they found their footing in a new world. It was a world where Jesus was present in his resurrected form but absent in all the ways the disciples had experienced his presence during his 3-year public ministry. During those 3 years, the disciples’ lives had been changed in ways they could never have imagined when Jesus first invited them to leave their boats and fields and follow him. They had witnessed great acts of compassion, healing, forgiveness and love. They had also witnessed the horror of Jesus’ crucifixion, and felt the intense loss and grief at the death of their friend and teacher.

But during those 40 days between Jesus’ Resurrection and his glorious ascension into heaven, the disciples found strength in the knowledge of Jesus’ promises, his abiding spirit, and in their common life together. As they talked and prayed and began to venture back out into the world, they felt Jesus’ presence with them, encouraging and supporting them in their new life as the living examples of Jesus’ Way of Love.

Over these past months we too have found our strength in a new world. We have learned to pray in different ways and to rely on each other, often from a distance. At the same time, we have learned the importance of our shared mission and ministry as followers of Christ.

When he ascended into heaven Jesus ended his physical presence on earth, but not his spiritual one. Jesus, God in human form, returned to the Father, taking with him all the human experiences of the good, the bad, the joy, the pain, the happiness and the sorrow of this life. His

parting words to his disciples were ones of faith, hope, love, and the promise to be with them for all time through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through his Ascension into heaven, Jesus completed the reuniting of God and humanity, opening the way for the spirit of God to fill the disciples and all of us with the power to be witnesses to all Jesus taught.

Luke tells us in his Gospel that just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he spoke to his disciples again, opening their minds to understand the scriptures as he had done with the two on the road to Emmaus. Then he blessed them and was lifted to heaven. The disciples were left standing there knowing what they had to do – to proclaim the good news of Christ to all nations, preaching repentance, a turning back to God, forgiveness, and love, but wondering how they would manage by themselves.

Having lived these last 14 months with our lives so changed by the effects of the pandemic, we too are looking to the future, preparing for what we need to do as a community of faith, and wondering exactly how we will manage as we move into this post-pandemic world. As the first disciples returned to Jerusalem and found new ways to be followers of Jesus and to spread his message of hope, faith, and love, so we too are finding new ways to be followers of Jesus in our 21st century world. We learned that the church, this community of faith is more than a building. It is more than an institution. It is more than another social action group. We learned that through the use of technology, we can reach beyond our local community to both share what we have learned and to learn from others. Our interactions are not solely relegated to being in the same physical space. Yet we have also learned how important that physical presence and touch is to each of us. We have learned that joining together in faith and prayer God will walk with us into the future and guide in being living examples of Jesus' way of love.

Let us use the things we have learned to make this a better world, and to explore new ways to be the light of Christ in a world in need of God's healing hand and Jesus' message of light and truth.
AMEN.