

A Sermon preached by Debbie Fice, Postulant

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Christ Church, Dartmouth

Open our ears Lord, to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, so that we may serve you, today and always. Amen.

Good morning, and welcome to Ascension Sunday! Today, in the Acts of the Apostles and Luke's Gospel we hear the story of Jesus' last day with his disciples. He teaches them one last time, he promises that the Holy Spirit will come to them, he gives them one last blessing, and then Jesus is lifted up – and as the Gospel says, “is carried up into heaven.” The disciples, while Jesus was being lifted up, are looking up until “a cloud took him out of their sight;” this passage, with the mental picture of the disciples looking up - watching someone that they loved very much being lifted up and away - watching until they couldn't see him anymore; brought back a memory that I haven't thought of in years. When I was eleven, my father was transferred and our family moved from Halifax to Quebec City, where we lived for four years. My grandparents, my Mum's parents, remained in Halifax, and we only saw them twice in those four years. The first visit was in our second year away; they flew up and stayed with us for two weeks. When it was time for them to leave, we all went to the airport to see them off,

which was my first time saying goodbye to someone at an airport. I remember, standing there at the window, watching their plane fly away and up into the sky, watching until I couldn't see the plane anymore, and wondering when I would see my grandparents, whom I loved very much, wondering when I would see them again. How many of you can remember something like that in your own lives? A time when you've said goodbye to someone that you loved, not knowing when exactly, that you would see them again, just knowing that you would have to wait. Those memories just might give us an idea of how the disciples felt, on that last day with Jesus, watching him go away, not knowing when they would see him again.

Because, that is one of the things that the celebration of Ascension is actually about – it is about waiting. Think about it – Jesus died, and then was resurrected, he then spent time with the disciples, teaching and reassuring them and now he says that he must leave them but that he will come again. The disciples, understandably, ask Jesus when he will return, and he tells them that ““It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” So, they are told, and now know, that they will have to wait for Jesus to come again. Jesus has also promised to send them the Holy Spirit, to empower and comfort them, but doesn't say when that that will happen – more waiting!

As a society, we are not patient people, content to wait for things, wouldn't you agree? We are willing to pay extra for Amazon prime, just to guarantee 24 hour delivery! We have pizza delivery in thirty minutes, or it is free! I know I, personally, prefer drive-thru banking and coffee because it seems more efficient. We have, over the last thirty to forty years, evolved into a society that considers waiting inefficient and a waste of time - haven't we? Ascension is one of those times where we are reminded that waiting is sometimes necessary.

In a way, we can sort of think of this time of pandemic as a type of Ascension-tide, don't you think? We are in between life-as-we-knew-it three months ago, and we are waiting to see what life after the pandemic will look like; but right now we are still in that in-between waiting time. Yet, there are – believe it or not – some positive things to be found in this in-between, or liminal, space. In their waiting time the disciples didn't have all of the answers that they wanted, but they did have each other, they had a clear directive from God and God's blessing, they had worship and they had joy.

In our own in-between time, what are some of the positive things that we have and are learning? We have learned to spend time again with our families (a possible mixed blessing, some days), many of us have rediscovered the joys of cooking and baking, we have come to truly appreciate Spring, we have learned

how important the people that we care for are to us, we have learned new ways of being together and we have learned that church doesn't have to stop just because we can't enter the building. Most of all, I think that we have all realized that we can change and adapt, that we don't have to 'do things the way that we always have done'. THAT is the main purpose of in-between times – they teach, change, and prepare us. They help us learn to appreciate and mine all moments, the expected and unexpected seasons, the welcome and the difficult stretches of life. In-between times can forge in us a skill that the faithful of all ages have to learn: the art of waiting.

So, may I suggest that we recognize this pandemic-time as a type of Ascension-tide, a time of waiting, an in-between time, and re-learn the art of waiting? May I also suggest that we recognize those gifts that this time has given us, and use those gifts to shape and anticipate the time to come? Amen