

Easter 7—Year B  
Acts 1:15-17, 21-26  
Psalm 1  
I John 5:9-13  
John 17:6-19

In Christian experience, we talk so much about the dance of **death and resurrection, endings and new beginnings**; it's a **dialectic**, that *Hegelian process of change where something passes over into and is preserved and fulfilled by its opposite*; **death and resurrection**, it's a **rhythm, back and forth, back and forth**. Over time, we learn this dance well because it captures the truth of our experience. We see it in the **cross and the empty tomb; Good Friday and Easter morning**.

And we see it again in **Ascension**, another feast marking *another ending, another letting go of Jesus, releasing him to heaven, to sit at the right hand of God*, which is just another way to say **dwell in the absolute fullness of Divine Presence**. *Heaven isn't a place but a state of union at its most complete and whole and intimate*. **Ascension** marks that *ending of Jesus' incarnated—in-the-flesh—time-and-space-bound companionship, and Pentecost*, which comes *next Sunday*, marks the *beginning* of the **Risen Christ set free to blow where he will throughout all the earth, throughout all time, in the power of the Holy Spirit—Christ gone cosmic**.

We see it in our *deepest dark nights of the soul, that eventually, turn to day*. We see it in *our deepest losses that take our breath away, only to find ourselves through some act that can only be described as courage, taking the next breath anyway*. **Death and life, ending and beginning, loss and acceptance, letting go and receiving anew**.

**But there is another step in the Christian dance**—we don't just do a two-step, but we **waltz**, and that **third step is about learning how to flow in the in-between time**. Yes, we all have our **deaths**, and yes, we all have our **resurrections**, but a daggone lot of life is lived *between* those two places. A lot of life is lived **having experienced the death and loss and ending, but not yet having tasted the new life that will come**. *Holy Saturday captures that space—in the tomb waiting to rise*. And *these 10 days between the Ascension of Jesus to the heart of God and the coming gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost* is another stretch of time that alerts us to the fact that the **in-between times are woven into our lives and our faith**.

*It's a difficult space to inhabit*. It's full of **ambiguity, uncertainty, confusion**. You don't know **which way is up and which way is down**. It can feel **heavy or like nothingness**. *It's definitely not comfortable*.

**On that night before he died, Jesus was doing a cram course** trying to get in all that last teaching before his death and departing. Remember, last week, he got it condensed down to **“remember, it's all about love.”** Well, today shifts *from* what **he's saying to his friends and disciples** to what **he's saying to God**. We often think about **how hard it is for the disciples to let go of Jesus**, but we don't often reflect on **how hard it was for him to let go of them**.

So, today is all about **Jesus praying to God for his disciples. Jesus praying for us**. Just sit with that realization for a moment. *Jesus prays to God for us*. He reminds God that **God gave them to him, and these beloveds were God's long before God gave them to Jesus to shape and form, and that all the words God gave Jesus, Jesus gave to them**.

*Jesus is lifting all of us up in his prayer, “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.”* It’s this incredibly *intimate language of relationship and connection*. **Jesus is proclaiming that all of his glory has been revealed in us**, so utterly human and imperfect as we are!

**And Jesus knows he’s going, and we disciples are staying, so he keeps on praying.** Jesus is having to **trust and entrust** as he heads into *his* great unknown. Just remember, when we are **struggling with our leavetakings and aren’t at all sure what our next homecoming will look like**, *just remember that Jesus struggled with that letting go*, too.

Jesus prays, **“And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.”**

*And I need to do an aside here before Judas gets thrown under the bus for all eternity.* Don’t forget that *Jesus feeds that one destined to be lost with the bread, his very own body, before that one had to head out into the night*. We do well to remember that great Orthodox tradition that says that *when Jesus descends into hell in his in-between time, it will be Judas who he pulls out of hell and back into resurrection life*. Be that as it may, **Jesus is aware that he’s about to lose proximity to his disciples—he’s leaving the world, and they’re staying**. He could **protect** them and **guard** them when he was with them, **but now, now, he’s got to entrust them to God**. So, **Jesus prays his heart out, “Holy Father, protect them!”**

*But Jesus doesn’t just want us to be safe, he wants us to be WHOLE—“So that they may be one, as we are one.”* This **“they may be one, as we are one”** is **THE scripture** quoted to support *our call to Christian unity*, but as I prayed through this text this week, something else emerged. It’s *not just about our interpersonal unity, individual to individual, or denomination to denomination—it’s bigger than that*.

**Jesus is praying to God to protect our wholeness.** This is about **integration** in every sense of that word. **Jesus was perfectly at one with God—in heart, body, mind, and spirit—divinity housed in humanity, humanity radiant with divine glory.** *Jesus was a whole human being fully infused with God’s presence and being.*

Jesus knows that *so much in this world tears at that fabric, pulling us apart in so many directions*. **Jesus is praying fervently to God to protect that oneness that we have found through him** because, more than anything else, **Jesus wants us to know his joy and to have his joy made complete in us.**

**Jesus isn’t praying to God asking God to swoop us out of this world, only to protect us from the evil one who would try to separate us from our deepest, Truest, most Beloved Self, that Self who has never not been one with God.** Living as one who **dwells that deeply in union with God** with the **unshakeable sense that you can’t ever lose this love**, oh that one will never belong to the **world** which proclaims that *everything—place, position, worth, status, love—is precarious and conditional*.

*So, Jesus knows it's going to be rough, and there are a lot of currents moving against us. So, he prays some more, "God, sanctify them, consecrate them, make them holy in what is true; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I consecrate myself, so that they also may be consecrated in what is true."*

**Jesus has prayed for you and for me, that *we would be marked as the holy vessels that we are*. Jesus sees that much worth in us. Jesus proclaims that we are worthy of holding the truth of God's love, and we are more than capable of pouring the truth of that love out onto a world that is thirsty for it.**

*These are the things that Jesus prays to God on the night before he dies.* These are the things that **Jesus wants God to give us as we move through the next days between death and life, leavetakings and the Spirit that is going to kindle our weary spirits into a blaze of love and power.** These are the things for us to sit with in this consummate in-between time.

**You are loved. You are bound so tightly in relationship with Jesus and God that you can't tell where they end and you begin—you are ONE with Divine Presence; you are complete; you are whole; there is a coherence integral to your being, *even when you don't feel it*, and your joy is found in that fundamental, foundational truth. You are consecrated. You have been made holy. *You can't undo that either.* Jesus has got a hold of us; *so too, does God*—and they ain't letting go. Oh, *the physicality of presence will shift, but not the proximity. Divine Presence is still the breath we breathe; it's still our deepest DNA.***

Don't worry about the fact that **you are hanging out in midair, squarely between death and life, Ascension and Pentecost—Jesus is praying us through, and God's not letting go.** Amen.

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