

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church
Newark, DE
Seventh Sunday after Easter – June 1, 2014/Year A
Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God in our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

AMEN

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I imagine many have had that feeling of **ALMOST but not quite yet** in our life. Perhaps it was around a project we are working on tirelessly, always seeming to have the final touches for completion, and then ... **ALMOST but not quite yet**. The Seventh Sunday after Easter is all about **ALMOST but not quite yet**. We arrive at the 40 day mark of the Easter Season on Ascension Day this Thursday past, but we are **not quite yet** to the 50 day mark and the Day of Pentecost. So like our brothers and sisters of faith in Jesus' time, and wait in the **ALMOST but not quite yet** time. It is most appropriate this day is called **Expectation Sunday!**

Expectation can fill us with **hope and excitement OR dread and discomfort**. Imagine those first disciples, looking upward, mouth agape, who quickly began to wonder HOW will we proclaim the faith we know when **the person of our faith is not present**. It is much easier to say, **"See, here is the Messiah I am talking about"** when the Holy One is right next to you, instead of having to point to OURSELVES as the bearers of this faith.

Expectation rarely answers our questions of **what will happen next ... what will I need to do ... what can I avoid doing ... are we there yet???** We need our secure walls of faith to keep all this stuff of faith in order, to know what to do and not to do, who is in and who is not. It is when I am most anxious about expectation and unknowing that I find comfort, or needed discomfort, in that well known poem by Robert Frost ...

**"Something there is that doesn't love a wall.
Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out.
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall
That wants it down."**

During this first **ten day waiting period**, before the disciples were readied to go forth in flames to the world then and now, we first must embrace that **nothing will be quite the same ever again!**

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Our scripture readings this day hold this tension for those disciples then and now. Jesus offers his “high priestly prayer” in the Gospel of John, preparing the disciples to go forth into the world in the Name of Jesus **ALMOST**. From the Acts of the Apostles, after the ascending of Jesus to heaven, and the angelic direction to get on with their ministry, they return to the upper room together, they return in prayer, and they return to **not quite yet**.

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the “high priestly prayer” from Jesus’ Farewell Discourse. Though the other Evangelists picture Jesus at prayer, only on rare occasion is the content of the prayer revealed. Jesus offers this prayer for his disciples on the night before his death, in which he asks for God’s continuing care for all who believe in him. Note that Jesus offers this prayer for his **disciples**, and not for the **world**. Jesus has overcome the world by his life, his ministry, and soon his death and resurrection. The truth of ongoing persecution and death will threaten to diminish, depress, and divide these followers in faith.

Therefore, Jesus prays that they remain united and their unity reflect the oneness of Jesus with God. The world needs the life of grace brought by his life and ministry; however, the community of faithful cannot be one with the world as long as the world chooses to reject this gift of life in Jesus. The disciples for whom Jesus prays then are the disciples Jesus prays for now, you and me. As our Lord prayed for and sent them INTO the world, so Jesus does for you and me now. As truth was entrusted and holiness conferred upon them, so Jesus does for you and me now.

In the story from Acts, the disciples are gathered with Jesus in Jerusalem after the Resurrection. They know something important is to come **ALMOST but not quite yet**. So what do the disciples do when they are in that “in-between” place of knowing and not knowing, of **ALMOST but not quite yet – they ask Jesus questions to fill the uncomfortable silence!** They ask if NOW is the time when he will “*restore the kingdom of Israel.*” Although they were hoping for a clear time and place for the restoration of the Davidic throne, Jesus reminds them that the time of God’s plan for the Kingdom is known only by God!

What Jesus does tell them is the **personal transformation** to all who believe through the coming Holy Spirit. The Spirit will empower them to become the witnesses of the Good News to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to “*the end of the earth.*” As Jesus ascends to heaven, “... *two men in white robes ...*” appear, and ask the more pertinent question – “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?*” They promise that just as Jesus has left them, he will come again in “*great power and glory to rule the world.*”

The first thing the disciples do, and maybe the only thing they can do, is go back to what works as shown by Jesus time and again. Luke says that they **RELY** on their prayers as they return to the Temple where they were continually found “*blessing God.*” [Luke 24:53] Luke says that the **WHOLE** Christian assembly – the disciples, certain women, Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers – returned to Jerusalem, to the upper room where they were staying, and they “*constantly devoted themselves to prayer.*”

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We first must come to embrace that **nothing will be quite the same ever again!** This is rarely a comfortable place for anyone to find themselves. Yet the power of the Spirit of our living God calls us to live in this holy discomfort by faith again and again.

One of the gifts of our three year lectionary cycle is that I can look back to sermons preached on various Sunday's in the church year, such as I did for this Seventh Sunday of Easter in 2011. I rarely "recycle" sermons in total, though portions that spoke to God's work in the world and St. Thomas's echoes onward to the present day. Such was the case today.

On that Easter 7 in 2011, I shared how **The Grove** was beginning to emerge into the reality of OUR calling to discern our participation and commitment to this gracious gift held by our diocese, or not. In July 2011, the first gathering of a group called to consider sharing their gifts and leadership in this discerning work came together. Not long after, the first of many meetings took place under the reluctant and not-all-that-convinced-this-would-work leadership of Tom Fairchild. This leader team took on the name **Forward in Faith**.

We are here this Easter 7 Sunday in 2014, growing and glowing from the May 18th kickoff luncheon, hearing that 75%+ of our \$435,000 goal has been committed, we continue **Forward in Faith – Our Journey Onward!** Yet we know not, at this moment, what will emerge with this gift in the near or long term. **We make our plans ... we share in our hopes and dreams ... we walk as yet by faith, never alone!** With the present power of our loving God, our risen Lord Jesus, and the saints of 172 years of our history, we will be the witness in our days to the TRUTH of God's loving and living power through **our lives, our ministry, and our proclaiming faith here and now.**

And here is the REALLY GOOD NEWS we can share to all we meet – **nothing will be quite the same ever again! ALLELUIA ... ALLELUIA ... and for Deacon Cecily, ALLELUIA!**

AMEN