

Mary Clare May 23, 2020
The Ascension of Our Lord
Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 1:17-23, Matthew 28:16-20

In this week's readings we see the disciples of Jesus facing the loss of their leader and friend as Jesus returns to his Father in Heaven. The disciples have been through a roller coaster of emotions in such a short time. First the trauma and horror of Jesus' terrible crucifixion and death, then his amazing and miraculous resurrection and their great joy to have him back in their lives again and then finding themselves alone again as he returns to God and leaves them to continue his work here on earth... Surely they felt confused and scared, helpless and vulnerable and not sure at all what were their next steps forward in an unknown and uncertain future.

Perhaps, this year more than ever we can identify with the disciples' feelings for aren't we experiencing these very same feelings during this pandemic? As they stand there looking up to Heaven they are feeling so confused and lost. I imagine them saying to each other and praying to God just as we are doing today, "What are we supposed to do? How are we to function? How can we go forward when it's all so scary and hard?" Throughout time it seems that God has always had more faith in us than we have had in ourselves. We pray for answers, and God gives us more and deeper questions. We pray for God to show us the way, and God seems to lead us in new and unexpected paths. For instance, did you ever imagine 3 months ago that 80 people from St. Mary's, some of whom hadn't been in church in months, would be gathering weekly in this way to pray and sing and take spiritual nourishment from God's Word and the amazing presence of each other—the Presence of God among us. WE may not have been able to imagine it then, but apparently God could, for it was God's Spirit working through all of us that has made this amazing assembly happen.

In the liturgical cycle between Easter and Pentecost we read the Acts of the Apostles which is the earliest record of how our Church was first formed by the followers of Jesus as they struggled forward with nothing to guide them except their own faith in Jesus and the ongoing guidance of God's Spirit as best as they could discern it. With uncertainty and confusion and different opinions and often conflicting priorities they went forward into the unknown creating what we've come to know as our Church. Does this ever sound familiar! Not unlike our experience of being Church today! But maybe that's how the Spirit works—to shake us up as much as to build us up. Back in the early days of our Church story, they weren't concerned with buildings and leases; that would come a few centuries later. They were wrestling over issues of belonging; who could be in and was the price of belonging for adult male converts circumcision? Ouch! For all the men I'm sure glad they went liberal on that one!

And as those early years proceeded, the Spirit of God guided our early Church fathers and mothers as they learned how to live out the mission of their Baptismal call just as the Spirit continues to guide us here in our St. Mary's community today. St Paul reminded them 2,000 years ago as he reminds us today, that gathered together as Church we are the Body of Christ here on earth and God's own Spirit will be in us and guide us always. He goes on to say "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call". Never have we more needed to hear these words and be challenged to live into their truth than we are in this very difficult time today.

For it is through the eyes of our hearts that we can see most clearly. When we are seeing with the eyes of our hearts, we are most in tune with how God sees through eyes of compassion and mercy, hope and promise. As we gather here today and scroll through all the faces we see before us on our screens, we see with our hearts and feel the love that connects us. With the eyes of our

hearts we can even see the faces of those who have gone home to God even though they don't appear on our screens. There's Dolores welcoming Sonny. There's Kirby extending his hand to Tom. There's Marty and Jordan and Ella and Sandy; all those who have gone before are now greeters at Heaven's gate waiting to welcome us home. With the eyes of our hearts, we see it all, and in and through it all, we see the face of God.

This is the gift of the Spirit in action in real time. This is the Church still gathering, the followers of Jesus still listening to God and one another and the still quiet promptings of the Spirit as we stumble forward into the Church of the future. What new life might God be bringing to birth? What new directions might God be calling us toward? We know our God is a God who is always bringing new life and hope out of the darkest and most painful times. Maybe this will be the time when we all step forward and began to really live into our Baptismal call to be priest, prophet and leader in our church communities. Maybe sometime in the future we will look back on this time and say this was the time when the clericalism that Pope Francis so wanted cleansed from our Church was finally put to rest. Maybe this will be the time for a new birth of collegial sharing of ministry where priests and lay people work together to be God's hands and heart in service to our poor broken world so in need of God's loving care.

Let's together as a community continue to see with the eyes of our collective hearts. Let's try to be patient with that which is still unknown and try instead to fall in love with the questions that God may be asking us to consider in these exceptional times. As we go forward with so much uncertainty in our world and here at St. Mary's, may we trust Jesus' promise, "I will be with you always" and may we continue to pray "that the eyes of our hearts be enlightened that we may know what is the hope that belongs to our call."

