

In the name of God, father, son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning. This week I had a choice for our Bible readings, which does not happen much as we follow the lectionary. I had a choice because Thursday was Feast of the Ascension. It is the day we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus from Earth. It is the last earthly act of Jesus that we see in the gospels. So I had a choice between us reading the passages for Ascension day or the Seventh and last Sunday in Easter. This does not happen much so I wanted to exhaust my options. I poured over both sets of readings and behold, I did not find any answers from reading the Bible.

Or at least the answers I was looking for. In fact, the pair of readings only left me with questions. The readings from Ascension day caught my eye though, from the Gospel of Luke and Acts, when Jesus appears before his disciples and as he is talking, he is taken up to heaven. He tells them to spread his word, he prays for them and he blesses them. During this he is taken up into heaven. So the disciples are filled with joy as they leave for Jerusalem.

This is a beautiful conclusion to the gospels but it leaves a sour taste in my mouth. As I place myself in the story as one of the disciples, I cannot see Jesus leaving as a good thing. I would not believe Jesus is leaving already. He just came back. Not from a lengthy vacation but from the dead no less.

This might be because I am horrible at goodbyes. About this time last year, I had just graduated. I had two emotions, extreme joy that I am done with school and a sour taste in my mouth. A feeling that I could only put words to afterwards. In my four years, I had made Messiah College and the surrounding community, my home. I made deep and meaningful friendships. I learned and grew into a different person and I had many mentors in church and school who helped me arrive there. It had truly become my home no matter how badly I wanted to get out into the real world and leave Pennsylvania. I did promise phone calls, facebook updates and the occasional visits but phone calls and facebook do not replace the face to face relationship.

The hardest of these goodbyes was someone who had become a great yet unlikely friend of mine from church, Mr. Weeden. A 95 year old black man who has fought all his life for integration, from the negro baseball league, to church to schools to even a local bowling club. My senior year, I would go to his house once a week just to hear his stories and to absorb knowledge from him. Some of which he would repeat over and over again because he forgot what he had already told me. We fit a great friendship into a little bit of time because I think we both knew sub-consciously that we don't have a lot of it.

One time I forgot to call him to tell him I am not coming that week, see I would usually just show up unannounced, but when I forgot to call him, he yelled at me through the whole Sunday service. I am not kidding, our priest had to tell him to be quiet, multiple times. We both loved each other and cherished our friendship. And of all my friends, teachers, or church folks, he was the hardest to say goodbye too. Not only because we were such great friends but because I did not know when I was going to see him again. I told him I would visit, but just the previous year he had broken his hip and I was scared for his health.

And just like I was scared to say goodbye to Mr. Weeden. If I was Jesus' Disciple I would be scared to say goodbye to Jesus. If I were them I would beg Jesus not to leave, to stay a little longer, this is our proof. This is our victory. Jesus you are here. Please stay. Please teach. Please heal. Please love. Jesus it has only been three years. Please do not go....

Jesus remember when you turned water into wine? That was an insane party.

Jesus must have had a great relationship with his disciples, an intimate friendship I am assuming. They did so much together, in a short period of time. They traveled, ate, drank and cared for other together. Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of God, he changed their world, flipped it upside down. He said the least in our society are the greatest. Jesus took them away from their families and from their jobs. He made them fishers of men and women. These real people had real relationships. They joked, laughed and went through hard times together.

But maybe the story does not end with sadness. My need for Jesus to be close might only be my desire to be with Jesus. Maybe that is why I love the Eucharist so much. It gives us a chance to be closer to Jesus through communion, than we might otherwise have. To break bread like Jesus did, to share it and to proclaim Christ death, Resurrection, and return. That is where the hope is in this passage. Maybe the reason the disciples were filled with joy was because in the reading the heavenly beings announce Jesus will come back, the same way he went away. Maybe they thought they would live to see their friend return. So there is hope.

But maybe the disciples did feel abandoned. Maybe they felt lost without their leader. But they had the promise. And they have a story to proclaim. And that story changed lives, It changed history and it changes us. That is why we proclaim every Sunday: Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.

Because maybe we too might feel abandoned. We too might feel lost. We too might desire to be close to Jesus. We might look around the world and ask "Jesus, why have you forsaken us". Jesus where were you in Manchester? Jesus where are you in Syria? Jesus where are you in the Philippines? Jesus Where are you in Egypt? In Richmond? Jesus where did you go?

Jesus said in Mathew before he was taken up "I will be with you always and till the end of days" That Christ being taken up to heaven only means that he has become fully one with the father. That he permeates through every living thing on earth by the Holy Spirit. But sometimes, sometimes, when the world is like this, I feel as if he is too far. As if He is just out of my reach. That he is not close enough. That all he has left for us, Eucharist, the church, the Holy Spirit, are not good enough. That they cannot replace the face to face relationship.

The Nicene Creed tells us that "He will come again in glory". We say this every Sunday. As I look around and see a world that is not how Jesus promised. I cry and I pray that Jesus comes, That the world is restored, that every tear is wiped away and that we are made whole. I pray for that promise. It is not for us to know the time of restoration, but Jesus... we are ready.