

Sermon Text – Sunday, May 17, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; 2nd Reading: John 17:1-11
Scripture for the Message: Acts 1:1-14 “Hope”

Today we pause – between Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of the throne of God and the arrival of the Holy Spirit resting on them at Pentecost. We pause to wait for the new thing God is doing, we breathlessly wait for the movement from the age of Jesus’ Ministry to the age of the Holy Spirit and like the disciples we stand in this space gazing up toward heaven. This passage tells us that during the fifty days between his resurrection and his ascension, Jesus’ taught his followers about the kingdom of God. Jesus warns them to remain in Jerusalem until the promised “advocate” arrives, “. . . in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

It was natural although a little naïve for them to ask “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Maybe they thought that because he lives again that now would be the time for overthrowing the oppressive Roman Imperial rule. Jesus once more reminds them it is not for them to know when – only the Father knows. When Jesus was taken up in the clouds, I can imagine why they stood there gazing upward. Probably they were wondering what now, and I am sure they were expectantly waiting for his return. Like obedient followers though they returned to the city and waited, joining with the women, including Mary Jesus’ mother and his brothers, in prayer. Praying and waiting, not because they were afraid but because Jesus told them to wait for the power of the Spirit to move them.

The description of their gathering is a description of what the church must be. The two primary activities of a faithful church are gathering to wait and to pray. Why are we waiting? We wait for the movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the people gathered, the church. “The movement of the Holy Spirit is not in the clouds with the historical Jesus but is being revealed on earth in a new way.”¹ That is what the two “messengers dressed in white” were trying to say to the disciples when they asked, “Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”

¹ Schmeling, Bradley E. “Acts 1:6-14 – Connecting the Reading with Scripture” *Connections, Year A, Vol. 2. Lent through Pentecost*. Eds. Green, et al. WJK. 2019. Print. 302-304

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This is a message of hope for the church, for us. Jesus is now in his position of authority over all creation and soon the Holy Spirit will come to empower Jesus' followers to do the work Jesus started. There is work to be done and the church must be about doing that work. Jesus did not leave his followers as orphans but sent the promised advocate, the Holy Spirit to give them / us the power to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. We, as followers of Christ, are baptized with the Holy Spirit and given the power to be witnesses for Christ. It is our hope and the hope of the church that our witness will bring the world into God's kingdom.

When Luke wrote "ACTS" there was considerable passage of time since the ascension and Pentecost. The apostles initially taught that Jesus' return was imminent, but now it seems that will not be the case, those who shared Jesus' fellowship were passing and new generations were left to conduct the tasks Jesus gave them. Maybe they no longer expected an imminent end to the "physical world. However, the world they lived in, prior to Jesus, did end – it ended with the crucifixion, it ended with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Easter changed everything and there is now a new reality for them, a new way to live. Jesus is neither absent nor has he absconded, but he ascends to a different place, a place of glory and authority. The former way of his being present with his disciples and the role for these followers of "the way" has changed.

We too are in changing times - This is a time for service; we need God's work to continue in our world. We can quote scripture, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37). We can refer to the "Great Commission" from Matthew 28 Jesus tells the disciples "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In the scripture from Acts he tells them, "You will be my witnesses." That is the task of those first disciples, that early church, and we are the ones to continue that task. We have been given knowledge to continue the work Jesus sent his disciples to do, the work Jesus was sent to earth to begin. The world we live in is starving for the truth and through the power of the Holy Spirit we have that truth. The role of the church is to ensure the hope of God's kingdom reaches all the nations of the world.

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The question this passage of scripture brings to my mind is – are we taking time to pause and wait for the arrival of the Spirit's power and guidance? During times of turmoil and divisiveness we can be like those first followers of Christ. We can gather in community and pray continually for the Spirit's guidance. The men and women gathered in that room did not know when the gift God / Jesus promised would arrive. They did not know whether it would be in a few days, a few weeks, or in their lifetimes, but they gathered to wait and to pray.

To me those actions signal hope. Hope that what Jesus promises would come to them. Hope that they would have the power to do the work Jesus was instructing them to do, power from the gift of the Holy Spirit. Hope is the work of the church, for the few of you who hook up the computer on Sunday mornings you might recall my reminder taped to it – “Hope is an Action Word.”

So, I think about hope. I have a book in my office titled *Wellsprings of Hope: Prayers for a Prophetic New Vision for Disciples*. It is edited by Richard Lowery a former instructor of mine and the spouse of the former general minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The book offers weekly prayers from various individuals and are all drawn from Isaiah 35. One prayer struck me as timely – this is written by Brad Lyons, President and Publisher of Chalice Press and it is based on Isaiah 35:5-6 “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.” He comments that we don't always get to recognize the time when then becomes now and his prayer is this:

*O god, you ask us to be patient; but waiting is hard,
especially when it's anticipating a result we really, really
want. We thank you that you are with us in that waiting.
Our time is not your time. But when the time comes,
what a day that will be! Amen.*

I think about the followers of Jesus, in that room waiting and praying as Jesus has instructed them but waiting is hard. We come to this sanctuary each week to worship – we sing, we pray, we listen to scripture read and interpreted for us by the preacher, and we commune. We gather as those first followers of Jesus did and we

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wait for the guidance of the Spirit as we worship. This is hope in action.

It is not for us to know when “then becomes now” but we know that things have changed. Just as Jesus’ first followers knew that there is a new reality for them after the resurrection. Death is no longer the ultimate “ending.” Their view of the world prior to knowing Jesus has ended. Knowing Jesus does that for us to, he changes things. For those of us who turn our lives over to Jesus as Lord and Savior things will not, cannot, be the same as they were before.

We live in a world of chaos, violence, oppression, and injustice. Maybe we don’t feel it in our individual lives but if you deny it is happening you may need to have Jesus open your eyes and unstop your ears. We, as the church and the body of Christ, must be about the work Jesus started – the work of bringing hope to the hopeless, proclaim good news to the poor, and to comfort those who mourn. It’s hard work this waiting and hoping but it is not work that we do alone. The church is a community that gathers and prays together, we are enabled for the work God calls us to through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That is who these first followers were waiting for, that is what we will celebrate next week when we remember the day of Pentecost but for now, we pause gazing up to heaven after Jesus’ ascension and we wait for the Spirit.

We cannot pause long, there is work to be done, we are witnesses of God’s power. The church is part of a global company of Spirit-infused witnesses to the reestablishment of the reign of God. In these changing and troubled times, we must be about the work God has left to us. We must make the activity of hope the purpose of this church – helping those who come to us find hope even when we do not know when “then becomes now.”