

- Read Luke 24:44-53

[From The Upper Room *Disciplines* for Thursday, May 21 by Stephanie A. Ford]

Lectio divina, the practice of reading and meditating on scripture, enables us to read even familiar passages in new ways. The practice helps us ask ourselves, What may God be inviting me to find in this passage? What is the living word for me today? One phrase that shimmers off the page is as simple as it is profound. Jesus tells his disciples: “You are witnesses of these things.”

On this day of Christ’s ascension, we are invited to join the disciples in awe as Jesus takes his leave from earthly existence. For forty days, [after Easter] the resurrected Christ has been appearing with comfort and challenge [to the disciples]. Now it is time for him to ascend to his father.

The life of faith includes joyful and dry times. Yet 2,000 years later we too experience the risen Christ among us. We have felt Christ’s presence in the grace of conversion and in hands raised in heartfelt praise. We have felt like vessels of Christ to others. Can you remember a time when the words came right through you, and you knew they were not yours but those of the Christ within you?

My father’s time to leave this life caught me by surprise. We thought he had a lot more time. Rushing to his bedside, I thanked him for all that he had given our family. Then, I felt the Spirit say through my voice: “Go toward the light, Dad; go toward the light.” His hand dropped, and he took his last breath. My sister, brother-in-law, and I watched in awe. These words were not planned or intended; rather, they were given. The three of us bore witness to the work of Christ among us.

And so we return to join the disciples in this moment as Jesus leads them out of Jerusalem to neighboring Bethany. We stand with them as Jesus lifts up his hands and blesses them and us before ascending to the heavenly light.

[I like Stephanie Ford’s question for us today. “Can you remember a time when the words flowed through you, and you knew they weren’t yours, but from somewhere beyond you? That somehow you knew the words that flowed from you were from Christ within you? I am certainly a witness of such things.

I remember like it was yesterday when words from beyond flowed from within me with an unusual amount of authority the day my father died. Despite it being an extremely exhausting day driving across the SC and NC border, I found myself in a kitchen room face to face with the last two people who were with my father in that horrific car accident. The words that could’ve filled that room from my mouth were surprisingly turned into words of forgiveness and love. Facing my father’s nephews, I pleaded with them to forgive themselves. That this accident was not their fault. As much as I, in that moment, did not want them to forgive themselves. My love for them and their love for my father compelled me to speak the truth to them and with authority. They needed to hear from me that they had forgiveness from me, my father’s son. And they needed to hear from Jesus that they had forgiveness from God, so forgive yourself I said, and know you are loved and forgiven. Through tears and hugging, through grief and pain we were all witnesses of these things.]

Jesus, we join generations of witnesses to your great love, forgiveness, and wisdom. Enliven us as we bear witness to you in our daily lives. Amen.

[For further reflection and study of Jesus’s Ascension read John 17:1-11 and this study from umcdiscipleship.org “Faith Formation”]:

- Define the word “glory.” **[You might think about how a parent glories in or takes pleasure in an accomplishment of a child or pridefully delights in a child’s abilities.]**
- Looking at your definition of glory, what might Jesus be asking for when he prays, “Glorify your son . . .” (v. 1)? How will Jesus glorify God the Father (v. 1)? **[Jesus glorifies or exalts the Father by willfully being obedient to the Father through his ministry, life, death, and resurrection. The Father receives glory as Jesus’ ministry and actions reveal the heart of a loving God.]**
- Work to define the phrase, “eternal life” (v. 2). **[A more literal translation might be life everlasting. More than merely a destination, John’s Gospel reveals eternal life is a quality of life that begins the moment we believe (that Jesus is sent by the Father) and are in relationship with God that carries on past death.]**
- What does verse 3 contribute to our understanding of eternal life? **[That it is about relationship with God more than merely being about a destination.]**
- What might it look like for Jesus’ prayer, “that they might be one as we are one,” to become reality? How has Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection provided a model for what it might require of us to be in unity with Christ and the church?