

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Easter 7B  
May 12, 2024  
Acts 1:12-26; John 17:11-19

Now What?

[Jesus said,] “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” (John 17:14-15 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

What were the disciples going to do now that Jesus had ascended into heaven? What were they going to do now that Jesus was no longer with them visibly? As they stood stupefied, it took the two men dressed in white to awaken them with their question, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking intently into heaven?” And although it would have been comforting to know that Jesus would return in the same way the apostles saw Him ascend, there was still a nagging question, “Now what?”

They could have done lots of possible tasks, and some of them could have been quite useful. They could have organized themselves, written a mission statement, and give each apostle a specific job description. Or they could go back to their old way of making a living. Or they could have sat around waiting for something to happen. What were they supposed to do now?

And what about us? Ascension is past, but Pentecost is not yet. This is the Sunday (the week) “in between.” Decorations are down or will be coming down to await next Lent and Easter, God willing. The Paschal or Easter candle is temporarily extinguished. So, what are we supposed to do now? With Jesus hidden from sight, does He see my struggles, or is He too busy to listen to my prayers? Does He know that nations and economies, churches and Synods are in desperate need of His help at times like this? Indeed, Jesus answers these questions and more with His directions for His disciples, now apostles, at the end of Luke’s Gospel. A little bit before His ascension, Jesus reminded them of the “promise of my Father,” speaking about the coming Holy Spirit, and He specifically instructed them, “stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

What the apostles did in those few days between Ascension and Pentecost is written for you in the rest of Acts chapter 1, as you just heard. They followed the directions of Christ the risen and now ascended Savior. They did not take matters into their own hands, as though they

were in charge, now that they couldn't see Jesus. They recognized that Judas' betrayal had left them short-handed. So, by following the clear direction of Scripture, they filled his office with another apostle. They stated unmistakable qualifications, presented the candidates, then as indicated by their prayer, left the choice in the hands of God, who knows the hearts of all, and Matthias joined the eleven. That order of business, along with their continual praising God in the temple and worship of the ascended Lord Jesus, was what occupied their time until Pentecost came.

How simple it is! Just wait until the Holy Spirit comes. Fill a vacant position, and worship God, telling of the kingdom of God that has come in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. That's it. Sounds so passive; it doesn't have any human initiative or ingenuity in it. There are no programs. There are no mission statements of great plans to cover the globe with good news. They make no blueprints for impressive buildings to stand as permanent testimonies to the saving Gospel message. They had been given no such commands. What they did have was the Father's promise. They had the promise of Jesus that, "Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20). They had the Lord's own breath breathed upon them together with His command to forgive the penitent and retain sins upon the impenitent. All the other things, as important and helpful as they can be, are secondary. They know that the church depends completely on God's Word and the Holy Spirit, who comes to us through that Word.

We can learn from the apostles not to let secondary stuff lead us away from the priority of the Word. Not allow our human institutions, our buildings, and policies crowd out the Church's one foundation, which is Jesus Christ her Lord. The Holy Spirit is here among us. We are not left looking up into the sky on Ascension Day or simply waiting for Jesus return. It can be tempting to think and act as though God has not yet fulfilled a promise that you thought He had made to you. Perhaps the secondary things, the added blessings of your heavenly Father, have become your highest priority over His Word and promise to you. Trials and struggles have pushed you to doubt God rather than to turn to His Word, praying to Him for what He has already promised to give.

Let the forgiving breath of Jesus remove your doubt and comfort you. You are not alone, you have been washed clean and reborn as a member of the kingdom of God, the Body of Christ. You are called by His name, which is the name the Father bestowed upon the Son, and together with the Holy Spirit, that same name is combined with water in Baptism. You call on this very name when you pray in any situation, both in good and bad times. You are not in an "in between" time, the same way the disciples were, because Jesus is with you, not in your imagination or your intangible "religious thoughts," but really here in flesh and blood because His word promises it. He is here in His Word of Truth that you hear preached, He is here in His Words that are combined with the bread and wine, for He promises that they truly are His Body and Blood given for you for the forgiveness of sins. He has provided all of these things, and you didn't have to make any of it up. Sure there are secondary things and added blessings that none

of us deserve right along side, but most important of all you have that all-important Word of Christ's promise from the Father.

So, let Jesus' prayer in today's Gospel (John 17) be a comforting word for your soul. Our Lord prayed for you, for you are His Church, a congregation of saints who gather together to hear the Word of truth preserved for us by His Apostles. He continually prays for the Father to guard you from the Evil one, and those in the world who will hate you on account of the Word. He prays for your sanctification in the truth. That means that the cleansing and forgiving Word of Christ that you hear in church, and privately from the pastor, and from the forgiveness you receive from your fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, that same Word renews you in the image of God and makes you a holy people, consecrated and set apart from the sinful world in which He has placed us temporarily. These things Jesus accomplishes for you now simply by speaking the Gospel to you. The Holy Spirit offers your sometimes feeble prayers before God's throne, for as St. Paul assures us, "We do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words... [and] the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Rom. 8:26-27). Being a saint, and therefore receiving the benefit of intercession by the Holy Spirit, is not a status toward which you and I work to attain, rather it is a privilege of sonship that you already have by Divine decree. Believe with all your heart that your Savior prays and works daily in His ascended glory for your forgiveness and holiness and growth in faith, until the time comes when you depart this life and join Him.

So between then and now, take hold of the gift you have been given, and trust in the Gospel alone for your salvation and your Christian life, rather than looking to yourself. Confront your sinful nature head-on, rather than make excuses to sin. There is nothing to fear as you live in this sinful, hateful world, and deal with sinners, including yourself. For no matter how often you have stumbled and fallen, and though you do not see Him, your Jesus is still here to pick you up, and the promises of His Word guarantee it. Indeed, He will come again, and with glorified and restored sight, you will most certainly see your Lord soon. But in the "in between" time you have been given, look to His Word, His baptismal font, His altar, His called servant of the Word with forgiveness on his lips—these are the places you'll find Jesus now. They are the constant fountain and lifeblood of the Church and a more than adequate answer to the question, "Now what?"

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener  
Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg  
1297 E 900 Ave.  
Shobonier, IL 62885  
church: (618) 846-8383  
personal cell: 330-204-4180