

Dear Christian Friends:

44 Then [Jesus] said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." 50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke 24:44-53

There is a phrase often spoken by tour guides in Israel: "Tradition makes it holy." What that means is that while there might not be direct, empirical evidence for the occurrence of a scene described in the Bible, circumstantial evidence and a good imagination can provide a satisfying, faith-full experience.

That was our sense when the tour guide took us up to a hill on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Luke's gospel says the resurrected Christ Jesus led the disciples "out as far as Bethany." In reality, it was a quick bus ride to the place where it is believed Jesus ascended into heaven. There's a large rock at the crest of the hill, and if you are good at Rorschach tests, you can see a footprint in the rock where, supposedly, he lifted off and rose into heaven. Tradition made it holy for us; I stood there awhile looking up into the sky, wondering what the first disciples might have been thinking.

Today is the 40th day after Christ's Easter resurrection and is known liturgically as the Ascension of Our Lord. If the number "40" screams out at you, you've already correlated it with many other things in the Bible where that number was significant: days/nights of the flood, years of wandering in the wilderness, days of Jesus' temptation...to name a few. The meaning of "40" is "just the right amount of time...in God's time." (Forty also happens to be the root of the word "quarantine" – sailors who came back from trading voyages had to spend 40 days in isolation to make sure they were not carrying the bubonic plague.) So in the church, 40 days after Jesus rises from the tomb, we celebrate his rising into heaven.

But before he goes, Jesus gives some final instructions to his disciples: remember what he's taught them about the Messiah, remember that repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, and remember that they've heard and seen it all. They are witnesses! And one more thing...wait in Jerusalem until they get what God has promised: power from on high. Then he blessed them and was carried into heaven.

What could it have been like for the stupefied disciples left standing on the hill in Bethany? Luke says they returned to Jerusalem with "great joy" and "were continually in the temple blessing God." But they returned there to wait. Wait. Wait. Wait...until they received (we know from hindsight) the gift of the Holy Spirit, which came on the Jewish festival of Pentecost. But they didn't know **how long** they would have to wait. And yet, they kept worshipping and blessing God.

How long are we going to have to wait before we are able to return to our normal activities of work, school, sports, clubs, social groups... and church gatherings for worship, study, prayer and service? We don't know right now. There are some hopes and projections and guesses, but as we've heard

before, the coronavirus is in charge and all we can do is respond with safety protocols that keep as many people healthy as possible. And then we wait. Wait. Wait. Wait...until it is safe to resume activities that will require a 'new normal'.

So while we wait, consider these two things. Waiting can be an important part of the powering up process. Those with laptop computers or smartphones know that when you get a new device, to ensure you get the most out of the battery, you need to charge it to 100% capacity before you use it. With laptops, it can be 24 hours; with phones it's usually 3 hours or less. But if you don't wait long enough and try to use it too soon, it can severely limit your battery's power. Waiting long enough is vital to get full function.

And secondly, we are not idly waiting. Like Advent, our waiting is filled with hope and purpose. It's still uncomfortable – we all get that, don't we?! – but there are things we can do while we wait. We can still worship, a la Zoom, Facebook, and written materials. We can sing, we can pray, we can give back to God. We can bless God for our health, for our family's safety, and for all the people who are working on our behalf to keep us protected. And maybe we can start a new tradition while we wait.

St. Francis and I wish you holy waiting ~

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