

Acts 1:1-11
Psalm 47
Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 24:44-53

Sermon May 21st, 2023

The Hope that Comes with Change

The disciples go through a lot of major change in their lives. From the moment Jesus comes to them and invites them to leave everything behind to come and follow him. To the moment they scatter as they watch Jesus get arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. From the death of Jesus that leaves the disciples paralyzed with anxiety and fear. To witnessing the empty tomb, and the resurrected Christ, giving them hope that just maybe the Jesus movement isn't dead. From the ascension of Jesus, where Jesus goes up to heaven, leaving them to carry on the ministry without his physical presence. Where the disciples question their ability to carry on this ministry. To the day of Pentecost, where they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That empowers them to carry on. The disciples of Jesus go through a lot of major change. In a short period of time (**Image One**: picture of a natural disaster).

It is not surprising that in our gospel, we see Jesus needing to repeat his teachings to the disciples once again. Needing to get their attention once again. When we go through major change in our lives, we get frazzled, disoriented (**Image One**). We find it hard to listen. To focus in on what needs to be heard.

It is not surprising that we see in the book of Acts, the disciples staring up in the sky as Jesus departs from them. Not wanting to let go. Struggling to look forward. When we go through major change in our lives, we grieve what we have lost (**Image One**). We are anxious and scared of the uncertainty of what is to come.

When I reflect on how the disciples are feeling in these moments of major change in their lives, I think about how we feel when someone we love dies. We feel disoriented. We grieve. We spend a lot of our time looking back. Wishing things could be like they used to be. We feel anxious and scared about what our future will look like without them in it.

Or when we go through a career change or move to a new company, we feel disoriented as we try to adapt to our new surroundings. We grieve the people, the community, we leave behind. We feel anxious and scared about the uncertainties that come with forging new relationships.

As the church, we have seen major change (**Image One**). Society, community is being defined in new ways, and it is having a huge impact on the church. For a lot of us, we grew up in churches where we needed to get here early to sit in our favorite pew.

Where Sunday School rooms were full. Youth groups were vibrant. The church was the social place where many people hung out. We had more than enough resources to do all the ministry we felt called to do in our community. We were planting new churches across the West as immigrants came over in big numbers from Europe after the Second World War.

And now, outside of Christmas Eve and Easter Morning services, we look around and see empty pews. We struggle to find the resources we need to do the ministries we feel called to do in our community. Young families and youth are few and far between. It has been at least thirty years since we have seen a new church planted in our community.

Unfortunately, the church is going through major change (**Image One**). And like the disciples, we are disoriented as we try to stay relevant in our rapidly changing community. We are walking on uncertain ground, anxious and afraid, of what is to become of our church. We are grieving. Staring up in the sky, looking back on the way things used to be.

When we go through major change, as an individual, as a community, we can feel disoriented, anxious, and afraid (**Image One**). We grieve.

But as we see in our gospel, there is also a hope, a joyous anticipation that comes with change (**Image Two**: people rebuilding after a disaster). Hope for new opportunities to find purpose and meaning for our lives, as well as, for our community. Joyously anticipating the new life that God promises us through Christ Jesus. When Jesus ascends into heaven, the disciples are not dejected and downcast. The disciples worship and feel joy over Jesus' promise of what is to come.

Jesus promises them a helper, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, that will breathe new life into the church on the day of Pentecost, giving them hope that Jesus' movement will continue to grow and nourish people across Judea, Galilee, and even to the ends of the earth. The disciples await this day with joyous anticipation.

Partly, because through out this period of major change in their lives, they bear witness to this new life (**Image two**). Yes. They gave up everything to follow Jesus. But look at everything they witnessed. People being healed. People being changed by his love. Yes. They scattered when Jesus was arrested and killed. But how many times did they witness the resurrected Christ reassuring them that death has not killed the Jesus movement? Christ is alive, and his movement will continue through the church.

So, now after the ascension, it is not surprising that they wait with joyful anticipation for Jesus' promise to come to fruition for them. That they believe that they will bear witness to new life happening in these changing times once again (**Image Two**).

Likewise, when we face major change in our lives, when we grieve the death of a loved one, we are invited to cling to the hope for new life that we find in Christ Jesus. We are invited to wait with joyful anticipation for new opportunities to find meaning and purpose for our lives. Like doing something you always wanted to do, but couldn't do before. Travelling somewhere or taking a class or spending more time with the grandchildren.

Likewise, when we face major change in our lives, when we grieve the community we leave behind, we are invited to cling to the hope for new life that we find in Christ Jesus (**Image Two**). We are invited to wait with joyful anticipation for new opportunities to find meaning and purpose for our lives. Like experiencing the innovation and new energy/passion that can spring forth from building new relationships, from new minds coming together, in your new place of employment.

When we face major change as the church, we are invited to cling to the hope for new life we find in Christ Jesus (**Image Two**). We are invited to wait with joyful anticipation for new opportunities to find meaning and purpose for our community. That even though what we have known is lost, that something new will spring forth. That though we just gathered for another service for closure for a Lutheran Church in Alberta, that the Jesus movement is not dead, but alive. That the gospel will continue to change lives in ways that we cannot even imagine. In Calgary. In Alberta. In Canada. Across the globe.

Yes. When we face major change in our lives, in our church, we feel disoriented, anxious, and scared (**Image One**). We grieve. But we also experience hope in the new life that we see come to fruition in the resurrected Christ. We experience joy in the new life that is possible as the Holy Spirit empowers the church yesterday, today, and tomorrow, to be Jesus' hands and feet in their community (**Image Two**). Even when it looks all but defeated.

When we experience major change in our church not all is lost. There is a deep joy that comes with standing in the Holy Spirit's presence. Knowing that God continues to work in and through us to keep breathing new life in the people we meet. Knowing that God continues to work in and through us to find new meaning, purpose, passion, possibilities for our lives, and for our community.

Let us pray, gracious God, as we face major changes in our lives, help us find hope in the new life we see in the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ. Open our hearts to feel the anticipated joy for the new opportunities we experience through your gift of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to continue to be your church in the world. **Amen.**