



# ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

## Episcopal Church & Student Center

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The Rev. Jerrold Thompson  
Sermon for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
St. Mark's on the Campus  
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“LORD, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” As our reading from Acts opens, the apostles find themselves at one of those in between times: the resurrection has occurred and they are gathered with Jesus, wondering what's *next*, imagining what the future holds, eager for what's coming. We can feel the excitement in their words: “Lord, is this the time?”

Jesus' response is telling. As another translation puts it, Jesus says to the apostles, “You don't get to know the time. Timing is the Father's business. What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses to the end of the world.” It's almost as if Jesus is saying to his followers, “Don't worry about time, don't focus so much on when or how things are going to happen. *Your* work, when you receive the Spirit, is to focus on living your life so that you are a witness to me. The other things will take care of themselves.”

Then Jesus ascends out of the sight of his followers, and they return to Jerusalem, where they spend their time in prayer. They are still waiting for the next thing to happen – and they are spending their time in prayer. We're also told that during this time, they replace Judas; they are rebuilding their community, dealing with the past, looking ahead to the future and to the mission Jesus has given them, and it's a process deeply rooted in prayer and in trust in God's guidance for both the present and the future of their ministry together, this ministry which is all about witnessing to their Lord Jesus, this ministry which we have in turn received.

“In the midst of suffering,” Peter advises in his words this morning to those at another in between time, those who are going through what Peter calls “a fiery ordeal,” “In the midst of suffering . . . cast all your anxiety on God. For God cares for you.” Offer the present to God whatever it brings, good or bad, for it all belongs to God just as you belong to God.

We find Jesus doing just that in our gospel this morning. This gospel passage comes from Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17. It occurs at the Last Supper and Jesus is praying for his followers. He's worried about them, about the future they are entering because they follow him, and he knows where his trust in His Father is about to carry him. With all that anxiety weighing on Jesus, he turns to prayer. "The hour has come," he acknowledges. "Let me glorify you. . . . All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but they are . . . . Holy Father, protect them . . . so that they may be one, as we are one."

We can imagine what it would be like to know that the choices we make endanger not only our own life but the lives of those closest to us. With all the possible ways of handling that situation, Jesus casts his anxiety for himself and for his followers on God. And he moves forward in faith on the path that has been revealed to him.

In times of both excitement and anxiety, we're directed to God in prayer, and we're reminded not to live either in the past nor in the future, but to live in the present, and in that present to live in a way that gives witness to our trust in the God of Jesus, continually turning over our life in prayer.

So many times over the years I have found myself pondering how much we human beings like control. We like living in the illusion that we are in control. We feel frustrated when we're not in control. How hard it can be to accept that we don't have total control over our lives as maturing adolescents, and how challenging it can be to turn over control to others as we age. And when we're out of control, we look for someone else to have control on our behalf. Sometimes we look to our government to protect us, or even to God in ways sometimes that don't quite make sense.

I remember a church friend 20 years ago once saying to Carol and me that if God wanted her to have her car fixed, God would have to take care of it somehow. She had a profoundly deep faith; she also at times abdicated some of her own responsibility in situations. The future is created by both of us, God and us, working together. Knowing what is our responsibility and what is God's is always a matter of discernment. The apostles could not know who God was leading them to replace Judas with without prayer and doing their part to discern God's guidance. Each time we seek God's guidance and follow it, we reinforce our ability to trust as well as our capacity for following more faithfully more easily.

One metaphor for this process is birthing. Women tell me that there's a bit of pain involved in having a child. They also tell me that it's worth it, and although the pain never disappears with subsequent births, you have lived with the fruits of your labor. Living into the future with God is a bit like that, too. Whether in easy times or painful ones, we deal realistically with the past as the apostles did, we cast our lives into God's hands in the present and we discern what we must do to serve faithfully as we move together with God into the future. And each time we do so, we reinforce our capacity to live more deeply into God's grace and to trust with more of our heart.

No, the apostles don't fully understand what's next in their lives with Jesus, no more than any of us know what living more fully into God's Spirit will entail. But they trust and move forward, knowing that any future into which God leads them will be filled with blessing.

Thinking once again about childbirth, I have a dental hygienist who has three children. With each child, she has been dreadfully sick and has had to take off months from work because she's confined to bed. After she became pregnant with her third child, she and I were talking about it all, and she said that she and her husband keep having children despite all this because she loves having kids. She's not too wild about being pregnant – but she loves having kids. Sometimes we will place ourselves very deliberately in situations in which we know that pain and trusting in God will be involved because of that to which we're giving birth in the process. We live fully into the present because of the glory of the outcome.

Next week we mark the coming of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the community that follows Jesus in a new way, the presence of God with the world in a different way, continuing the life of Jesus among us. Just like those early followers, we don't know everything that's ahead of us. But our call is not to *worry* about the future, but to accept the past, to live fully into the present and to pray our way into the future.

And through it all, our *first* order of business is to witness to Jesus in everything we do.

Amen.