

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

RELATIONSHIPS

GOSPEL

Luke 24:44-53

Then he 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." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 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, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

SERMON

I preached on this scripture two years ago when I met with you, most of you online, to deliver a sermon as my 'audition'. I was totally inspired by this amazing text and I brought out and explored SEVERAL amazing points that I thought were astounding! Thank you for bringing me on board anyway ... (laugh). Then last year Paula offered us a wonderful sermon, on this amazing scripture, entitled "Opening our minds and hearts". So I wondered, what could I say, when here we are at Ascension Sunday, same text, again? Should I take one of the sixteen points I made two years ago and build on that? Maybe not. How in the world could I say anything new when we explore the very same scripture every year?

Then my husband Pat and I were talking about how people love some songs that they hear on the radio. They love some songs more than others and want to hear them more often. Broadcasters like Pat who want to engage their listeners work to understand what those favourite songs are and play them more often. In Pat's case, the genre of the station is Classic Rock and two of the absolute favourite songs are *Let It Be* by the Beatles and *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. If you were a Classic Rock fan you would love hearing those songs A LOT! They are 'high rotation' songs, played a lot because they are loved a lot. I asked Pat, "Why do people love those songs?" He explained, those favourite songs capture BEST of the genre. Those songs epitomize everything that's good, and inspirational about Classic Rock. They, all by themselves, define Classic Rock.

AS it turns out, The Luke Gospel, Jesus' Ascension is a 'high rotation' scripture. We like to hear it, possibly we even NEED to hear it ... often. Because it speaks to the very essence of our faith; the core of our belief in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and the core of our practice as Christians.

Two years ago I got all wrapped up in the details of this scripture ... and it was awesome! Well for ME anyway, but today I invite us to hover at the '30,000 foot' scope ... all the way to 'heaven' and explore the inspiration of this scripture to our faith and Christian practice.

In this scripture, we see 1) God, the transcendental power that creates all existence out of love, we see 2) Jesus Christ, we see 3) the disciples, and we see 4) us, **the descendants, the inheritors**.

This wonderful story is all about RELATIONSHIPS. Relationship with the power of creation, with those we see and those we don't see; with those we know personally and those we don't. God in relationship with Jesus Christ and the world, Jesus Christ in relationship with the disciples and with God his Father, God in relationship with the disciples through Christ the Saviour, and the disciples in relationship with each other, with God, with Christ and, ultimately, **with us, the descendants, the inheritors**.

Last week Bob told us about our need to *Push On*, in spite of 'not knowing' ... trusting that we have not been left orphaned; we are NEVER alone; we are in eternal relationship. The Gospel of John explains:

ON THAT DAY (in the future) that the Advocate (the Spirit of Truth) will come **YOU WILL KNOW THAT I** am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

In John 17, also recounting Jesus physically leaving the disciples, but remaining in relationship, Jesus offers this prayer that we understand our relationship. Jesus prays with God for the disciples...

All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. **Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. John 17:26**

God and Christ and the disciples and US, the inheritors.

We are all in permanent relationship with God and with Christ and with EACH OTHER! We are in RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER in that same profound everlasting nature of all creation! We always exist in this relationship.

It doesn't matter where we are on this, or probably ANY planet, we are in RELATIONSHIP with Our Creator and our Saviour. Jesus marched the disciples out to Bethany to demonstrate this. At the time, the general thinking was that the "hole in the sky that God looked through to earth" was in Jerusalem but Jesus needed them to know that their relationship existed everywhere. "Place" does not alter our relationship. Heaven, earth, Egypt, Canaan, Canada, Peru... we simply cannot be any other state. Relationship is who and what we are. A vast network of RELATIONSHIP.

We, right here, are in that same, eternal relationship with those battling in the Ukraine, in Sudan and in Afghanistan. We are in RELATIONSHIP whether we are in love and in peace, in anxiety, in silence or in chaos, in wisdom or rage. God, Christ, Humanity ... one big relationship whether we can see it or not. God does not ... CANNOT abandon us; God cannot be out of relationship with us. Neither can we be out of relationship with each other. The being that we are is this multirelational being.

When Jesus left this plane, he called his disciples to exercise the relationship by proclaiming their first hand 'witness' to the healing power of peace; and that the time is NOW to 'preach repentance and salvation to all nations'. Jesus promised a Holy Spirit would land with them to help them fulfill all this. He would not leave them alone. The Spirit would come, and they would be "clothed in the power from on high".

You and I know that the Holy Spirit, once solely with Jesus, will be with us ALL. In ten short days, the church of Christ is formed.

But, the Spirit hadn't come yet. Jesus was gone. Nobody knew what was supposed to happen and the disciples are alone. They were told to go back to Jerusalem and wait, alone.

Wait how long? Wait for what? How will we know when this 'Spirit' is on us? We're told that they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually praising, blessing, and giving thanks to God."

How would we, the descendants and inheritors of this magnificence behave here? Well, first of all we'd probably split up and go our own ways, disagreeing, probably on what we should do next, where we should wait, how we should praise God. Communal activity is not easy for us in this culture. Maybe we'd stumble back together and feel the power of the Holy Spirit and begin the Church... but it still happened. We couldn't continue to practice our Christian faith in one group. Christian denominations happened. Christ's church became splintered.

But as we stumble out, sent to preach repentance and salvation, **God forgives our rambling, our uncertainty and most of all our certainty** ... in the neighbourhood of seventy times seven times. As Richard Rohr says in the quote from his blog this week, "God is showing a preference and capacity for *sustaining relationship over being right, distant, superior, and separate.*" We might attempt to find that kind of forgiveness that does not become offended, in order to sustain our relationships with each other; in order to stop splintering the Church of Christ.

Next Sunday, Garry will help us see the power of Pentecost as we celebrate the rush of Holy Spirit, but right now, like the disciples we have an opportunity to ponder what might be asked of us. How can we mend a broken world one person at a time? How can we mend relationships?

In our work to 'witness' for Christ's church, we assemble to tell the stories of Jesus, to witness to the truth of Christ's power in our lives, to pray and to bless and thank God, to offer peace to each other and to the world. We, those who are still assembling in the name of Jesus Christ, witness and try to live the command to preach repentance and salvation in the name of the Church of Christ.

I wonder, though, about our track record of church relationship. In the name of truth, we Christians have done a number on Christ's body over the past two thousand years. What has happened that the church, Christ's body, has been divided into so many bitty pieces and why do we not seem to be able to stop dividing ourselves? Lutherans, Baptists, Fellowship Baptists, Mennonites, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, Free Methodists, the United Church, Reformed Church. Then there's the Evangelical churches, the Pentecostal, the Evangelical Baptists, Church of Christ; then the Seventh Day Adventists, Christian Scientists. This is by no means an exhaustive list of denominations in the Protestant Christian world. There are many dividing factors as we continue to see ourselves 'out of relationship' with others who also see themselves as worshipping and witnessing the risen Christ, but somehow we can't agree on how to do that.

Could we become a church without divisions?

I wonder if Christians could come together without the denominational lines drawn, in relationship with Christ and each other?

I believe we could, and I believe that a non-credal, congregational worshipping body such as MacNeill could be a place to begin welcoming other Christians in a relationship of worship together.

All people on this planet are in relationship with each other, designed by a creator that is, by the perfect design, in relationship with us, the creation. As we **wait** during this time of uncertainty, knowing that God is with us and that Christ has ascended, showing us the higher path to the power of peace and love, consider what relationships we might be being called to in this time and place.

Bob reminded us last week, that “God’s pattern persists across all human history (for any with eyes to see). The movement goes in (i) Old Testament through New, and in (ii) all history before and since; [the movement goes] *just as I preached back on Easter Sunday*; [the movement goes] *from captivity to release, from exile to return, from darkness to light, from ‘ending’ to ‘a remnant goes on’, from death to resurrection.*”

God makes things happen and we move in the relationship of cooperation toward God’s solution. Today we sit in the captivity of the divisions of Christ’s church with questions of the future. Can we sit here in our place of questioning for a little while longer?

When the Holy Spirit moves, it will blow a gale and the walls will come tumbling down. Might the walls begin to fall right here at MacNeill? AMEN