

## Acts 1:12-26

May 28, 2017

We need to set some background as we begin today. The disciples are on their way back from the Mountain of Ascension. They have seen Jesus in His glory. They have seen angels. The eleven are somewhat dazed and confused. It has been a tough six weeks. Jesus was arrested, crucified, buried, but then rose again. They had gone back to Galilee for a while, then back to Jerusalem. They had even gone back to fishing.

But what happens now? They seem to have no real focus or goal. They ask Jesus, "Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" It was the common expectation that the Messiah would take up the throne of David, set them free from their enemies, and usher in the golden age of Israel. All those expectations have fallen by the wayside. What are they supposed to do next? Jesus isn't there. They have spent the last three years following Jesus. Up until now, that had not been too difficult for the disciples. He would lead, they would follow. Go to Galilee, they would follow. Go to Samaria, they would follow. Go to Jericho, or the area beyond the Jordan, they would follow. There had been times of persecution and rejection, but Jesus had gotten them through those. They had seen difficult days and difficult situations, but they had turned out ok: the boat in the storm on the sea of Galilee or the challenge of feeding 5,000 people. They couldn't quite figure out how to cast out demons.

When Jesus would speak to them about going to the cross, they didn't understand. Sometimes they were filled with doubt and questions about what Jesus was doing. Why would Jesus stop and talk to a Samaritan woman at the well? Why would He sometimes heal with a word, sometimes with a touch, sometimes even by long distance? But for the most part, they knew where Jesus was going. He had said, "Follow me," and they did. Every morning Jesus would set out and they would follow Him. He set the itinerary and they went along. He set the agenda and they went along. He would give them detailed instructions to go get a donkey or prepare an upper room for the Passover, and they would obey. They could see Jesus, so it wasn't too hard to know where He was going. They just followed Him.

But now, that wasn't going to work anymore. They had been operating under what an airplane pilot would call "visual flight rules". VFR works like this: on a clear day with good visibility, a pilot can rely on visual references to get from one place to another. Watch your surroundings, watch the horizon, just keep your eyes open. Everything changes when you can't see where you are going. What do you do if you have no visual point of reference? Fog or cloud cover or darkness can quickly lead to what is called "spatial disorientation". In simple terms, it is the mistaken perception of one's position and motion relative to the earth. In the absence of external, visual references, you can become disoriented and your brain literally loses track of which way is up.

Did you ever walk out of a movie theatre and have your perception tell you that you are on the wrong side of the street? In the absence of external points of reference, a pilot can fly in circles and not notice. It feels like straight flight. It can feel as if you are flying straight and level, right up until you hit the ground. In the darkness people have flown full throttle right into the ocean. So, what is a pilot supposed to do? When you can't see any visual points of reference, and when you can't trust your feelings, you have to rely on your onboard instruments. Instead of VFR, you need to follow IFR, instrument flight rules: air speed indicator, compass, altitude, level flight indicator. Those instruments will save your life and get you safely home.

Up until now the disciples have been operating on VFR. They have been following Jesus. Where to go, what to do, how long to stay, have all been pretty clear. That ended forty days after Easter when Jesus ascended to heaven. Now their visual point of reference was gone. They can't see Him, so, what do they do now? Where do we go? What do we do? What is the focus? What is the goal?

Go back to what Jesus said to them before He ascended into heaven? He said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised. Don't go wandering off or you will get lost in the dark." Then He said, "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. You will receive power. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. They were to wait for a few days until the coming of the Holy Spirit. He would be their instrument flying equipment. John 16:13 ... *"When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. The Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."*

For the disciples, the day had come when they would no longer have Jesus as a visual guide to follow. But this is important: they would have something better. No longer would they follow Jesus by sight. Now they would follow by the directing power of the Holy Spirit and be guided by the word and promises of God.

So now, the disciples have returned to Jerusalem from the mount of Ascension. They don't have Jesus' visual presence and they don't yet have the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They must rely on what Jesus has said to them and taught them. You will be my witnesses. Go make disciples. Preach the gospel. Announce the kingdom. So Peter stands up and begins to do what the Scriptures have directed them to do. He quotes from the Psalms: We must fill Judas' place so that there is a full complement of witnesses to the resurrection. They prayed for God to guide their decision process and they chose Matthias.

What is the message for us in this? What are we supposed to take home here? Who or what do we have to direct our faith and our lives in the direction that God wants us to go? We are not flying blind, nor relying on what feels right. We have three invaluable resources: We have the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We have the Word of God. And we have Jesus praying and interceding for us. In today's Gospel, Jesus was praying for those who would believe through the message that the apostles would bring. That's kind of remarkable when you think about it. Most of our prayers are for things we need today or tomorrow but Jesus prays a future prayer that goes beyond tomorrow or next week. He prays for a message yet to be proclaimed. He prays for a people yet to be born. He prayed that the Word of God and the Spirit of God and the power of Christ would enable the disciples to do miraculous things. He prayed for greater things. John 14:12 ... "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

Do you realize what you have? Can you see the resources that are at your disposal? You have the clear promise of God that says your sins are forgiven through Jesus and His death on the cross. You have the clear word of God that says go make disciples. It tells you to always be ready to give reason for the hope that is in you. You have the power of the Spirit of God ... dynamis, dynamite power. You have Jesus' promise to be with you, even when you cannot see Him. What you and I have is a renewed and restored relationship with God. Sin disconnected us from God. Sin cut us off from the tree of life. Sin infects our relationships and continues to separate us from one another. Jesus came to change all that. In today's gospel He prays for unity, for oneness, for fellowship. His aim and goal is connectedness.

When God called out to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and asked, "Where are you?" it wasn't a geography question. It was a relationship question. They had become unplugged, disconnected from each other, disconnected from the world, and disconnected from God. Jesus comes to reconnect us and He bestows on the disciples the ministry of reconciliation, because when everything and everyone is connected, then joy is complete. Jesus met a blind man in Jericho by the name of Bartimaeus. Jesus restored his sight and said to him, "Go your way, your faith has healed you." It was a happy day. He could see. He responded by following Jesus. One day Jesus introduced himself to a man named Zacchaeus and invited himself to Zacchaeus' house. Zacchaeus responded to Jesus' call with joy and welcomed him gladly.

Disconnection is sorrow and sadness and death. Reconnection is life and salvation. Reconnection makes joy complete. How does it happen? It comes through the Word of God and the power of God and the promise of God. You have those gifts and those promises. You have God's Spirit now poured out to lead you, comfort you, and intercede for you. Thanks be to God.