

## It's not our First Choice

- [Acts 1:6-14](#)
- [1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11](#)
- [John 17:1-11](#)

I haven't yet worked out how to show pictures while we are live-streaming, which is a shame because there are many, many paintings of the ascension that we could look at. You can Google them if you're interested. Most of them show Jesus going straight up or doing an arabesque as he ascends. There are one or two which show the disciples looking at his feet, but the one that intrigues me most is from an altar panel, one of sixteen, painted by Johann Koerbecke for the Cistercian abbey of Marienfeld in Germany. He painted it in 1456 in bright, almost gaudy colors.

There are two things that fascinate me about this painting. The first is the expression on the disciples' faces. They range from pious – mainly the women – to shocked, angry or merely pensive. One is even turning away as if he's taking his ball and going home. Each disciple is having his own response and none of them looks happy. The second thing that fascinates me is that Jesus has left his footprints. The disciples haven't seen it yet because they're all busy looking up but in the very center of the painting on top of a greenish thing that is probably intended to be a moss-covered rock, there is a pair of footprints. Rather small, rather narrow, but definitely footprints.

Today we are doing something we have never done before. In the 30 plus years that St Benedict's has worshiped and served God we have always celebrated the Eucharist on Sunday even if it meant bringing in a priest from quite a ways away. Today we are breaking with that tradition. Fortunately, St. Benedict's has also always been willing to experiment with liturgy and to find new ways of worshipping God and deepening our commitment to being the Body of Christ together.

But this is not our first choice. We would prefer to break the bread. We remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus who knew Jesus in the breaking of the bread, but we also remember the disciples who found Jesus on the shore cooking breakfast for them, and I for one give thanks that fried fish did not become our central symbolic feast.

We are experimenting because St. Benedict's is not alone. We are part of a much larger body that makes up the Jesus Movement in the Episcopal tradition. There are many churches in that larger body who have not continued with eucharist during this time of sheltering at home. It seems that only about a quarter of the churches in our diocese of El Camino Real continued with eucharist. We have been asked to participate in a re-assessment of what we are doing, taking into account those who have concerns that we may not be fully honoring the sacrament.

So we are like the disciples on the morning of the Ascension. I am quite sure that their first choice was to go on having Jesus with them in his rather odd post-Resurrection form. Like us, they had gotten used to things being different. Instead of being with Jesus on a regular reliable physical basis, they had become used to his showing up in locked rooms, on remote beaches, on a country road and disappearing again just as unexpectedly. They had become used to his new greeting, "Peace be with you". And now this. Even this little comfort was being taken away from them.

And as they stared up into heaven, longing for the tangible presence of Jesus to stay with them, "suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Did they look down then and see his footprints?

Did their shock turn to understanding that Jesus the Christ had left an indelible print on the earth, and that they were called to do the same? Or did they just laugh ruefully and say "look, all he left were his footprints, not even his sandals or his cloak. At least Elijah left his cloak." I imagine their feelings were mixed but notice that they as they turned and went home, they stayed together and they devoted themselves to prayer. I imagine there were those who said it wasn't worth going on, that they might as well go back to their families and pick up life as it had been before they met Jesus. I imagine there were those who were angry and felt that God should just make his mind up. And there were others who were content to trust in the process and see what gift God had for them next.

But they stayed together.

Unlike the disciples, we don't get to live together in one big room. I doubt that we would actually like that very much. But it is not living in one room that ties us together. We are bound together as members of the Body of Christ. In our baptism we were sealed as Christ's own forever. Nothing changes that. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing can separate us from Christ.

Which is what Jesus is talking about in the gospel reading. It is one of those rather rambling and difficult to follow parts of Jesus' final talk to his disciples before the crucifixion. But it reads more like his final talk before the ascension, especially when he says, "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. " Jesus is no longer in the world but his footprints are on our hearts. His footprints are in our minds. We are his and he is ours and we are all one on God and none of that changes.

But what really stood out for me in the gospel was the beginning," Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you

have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

“This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” This is eternal life, to know God. If you are like me, you grew up with the idea that eternal life was something that happens when we die and is life just going on for ever, world without end. But perhaps eternal life is more spatial. Perhaps eternal life is the depth of life, when time stands still even just for second. When time stands still because for that moment we know God.

Those moments of sudden knowing and being known are rare, but we can do things to ready ourselves to know God, to prepare for that moment when the sudden, longed for, revelation occurs. We can open ourselves, our hearts and minds to the presence of the divine, to the astonishing presence of the Christ. Most of us do that when we stand in the communion circle, many of us have continued to be able to do that as we have prayed the prayers of thanksgiving on-line together. Today we will do that in the music and the prayers.

Remember the words of Jesus that we heard just last week, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” I wonder how many of the disciples remembered that as they walked away from the Mount of Olivet, still seeing Jesus ascending, still seeing his footprints, still reeling from the shock.

But over time they remembered, and we remember and we know that the Holy Spirit is alive and living in our midst and is always coming to us, making us one, drawing us together in the Body of Christ.