

We arrive now at the end of our Easter Season. It has been an Easter like no other in our lifetimes. That means it is as much like the first Easter season as it may be possible for us to experience. Filled with the unexpected, the fearful, the tragic, and perhaps most important, the transformative. Transformative if we will allow it to transform us.

Let's jump back to that first season following the Resurrection. Jesus returns to his friends and spends some intense time with them. In today's reading we find a very human moment, and I love those human moments. When I was growing up, everyone in the Bible were these distant, lofty personalities. Wise and wonderful, to be treated with the greatest respect and approached only in awe. As I have grown older, I have discovered the wonderful humanity of the first followers of Jesus. They still have much to teach us and can offer inspiring examples to follow. But they are very human, filled with human emotions, fears and jealousies.

In today's reading, we have one of my favorite. The moment has come, Jesus will return to the father. It's been forty days since he had risen from the dead. These are the people who saw him turn water into wine and raise the dead, and heal the sick, give sight to

the blind, die and return to them. When that moment comes, even though he's been telling them this would happen, they do one of the most human things they can do at that moment.

They gawk.

I mean, I can't blame them. This was a time in history where people did not fly through the air, but again, they had been around some amazing things in the last couple years. So, maybe, this shouldn't be a total shock to them. But we know it was because of what happens next. Angels show up. Now scripture does not call them angels. But, in general, when people start "suddenly" appearing all dressed in white with words of wisdom, you can be pretty sure that an angel is on the scene. And what are their first words of wisdom? Well, they're dealing with humans being human so we shouldn't be surprised that it goes something like this:

(I mime the action of someone watching someone else looking at something in the sky, up and down with a look of puzzlement on my face)

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT!?!?!?

In that moment God, through his messengers, tells us that we're looking at the wrong thing. That we need to re-focus. The

apostles begin a transformation. From followers of a teacher to a community dedicated to and living out the teachings of that teacher.

I will confess that I have a tendency to watch the skies for a sign, to wish for a burning bush, a pillar of smoke by day or a pillar of fire at night. And while I'm looking for those big signs, I sometimes miss what's happening right in front of me. That's when I need to remember to re-focus myself. When the disciples snapped out of their gawking, they went home. It was the upstairs room where they had been staying together. In that time and place it was home for that community of believers. They gathered together as they could, male and female, and worshiped together. They went about their business and took care of one another. Sounds like a solid idea to me.

Today, our trouble is different. Our opponent is an invisible threat, and one that can create devastation in our home, our community, our nation and the world. We are being called to care for one another. Not only in the active ways we have in the past, but in simple passive ways as well. That's creating an issue for some folks. I am not here to tell you how to think on that issue. But I may have an idea on how we all, no matter how we feel about what we are being asked to do, can work towards a resolution for this time.

At the end of our Gospel reading, Jesus says something of import for our discussion today. He begins with "... I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world..." Yes, we are. The world can be a hard place during the best of times, and this Easter season has been anything but the best of times. Jesus goes on "... protect them in your name that you have given to me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

So that they may be one. The apostles don't scatter to the four winds when Jesus takes off for the last time. They gather. As we continue to read in the Acts of the Apostles, we find them devoting a great deal of energy to caring for one another. The Word still gets spread, the work continues, but they recognize that caring for their community is a central part of their calling. Out of that rises our order of Deacons, and a tradition of reaching out a hand to those in need. The answer to what we should do **MUST BE** based in the model from those first days. How we deal with this or any kind of "bad times" should always begin with the question "Is everyone OK?". Then we can deal with what comes next. Some folks won't be OK, and we need to do what we can to help them with that. Some will be fine now, but may not be in the future. The question must always be "Am I helping?"

That's a challenge to an American culture that tends in the direction of the individual's needs, wants and desires over those of the larger community. The clear message of Scripture is that our direction is outward, caring for those who struggle. Some days

we can help more than others, but at the bare minimum we can ensure that we do not make it harder for them in troubled times.

I am proud to say that one of the first things your Vestry considered when it became clear that this would be an ongoing issue was how to make sure that everyone was OK. We're still working on that answer, but it's the place we began. As we should.

At this moment, are we gawking at the sky, and overlooking the work that needs done here in this world? What is it that distracts us from the questions that require our attention and an answer? We are human, and because of that we will have our human moments. Moments of outrage, fear, self-righteousness, and uncertainty. We can not wait for a sign in the heavens to re-focus our attention. We are here now, in a time that challenges us.

So my question for us today are these-

Are we willing to be one with the world around us as Jesus is one with the Father? Are we willing to come together and care for one another as the early church models for us? Here, at the end of our Easter season most strange, are we ready to be transformed?

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

