

"Source of Power"

The story of Jesus' ascension in Act 1:1-11 is mysterious in many ways. Did Jesus really rise up into the clouds? Why did Jesus ascend into heaven? We could read theological books about it, but they would not eliminate the strangeness of the story. Today, I don't want to engage in speculation. Instead, I want to reflect with you on a great gift in this story. We don't celebrate the Ascension because it's 40 days after Easter, and that's what we're supposed to do, nor because the creed says Jesus rose into heaven and sits at the right hand of God.

One big reason we celebrate the Ascension is to hear the news that we are going to receive power. We have no power of our own. But God promises to give us the power of the Holy Spirit. This was good news for the early church, a small, fragile and anxious community. They knew they had no power of their own. Any power they would have would be given to them by the Spirit. But they were not told how or where. So they ask Jesus, "Are you going to restore the Kingdom of God now?" It's the wrong question, but it's OK to ask Jesus wrong questions. Jesus tells them, in effect, "God knows when and how, but we don't. Don't worry about having things the way you want them. Wait for something better, a power that will come to you. Wait for God's gift."

We live in a time when we think it's all up to us. And furthermore, we think we should get what we want. But God tells us that it is not up to us. When we are baptized, it is all God's love and power that fills us. And we also come to see that life with God is not about what we want but about God's loving work in the world. Our life with God, as individuals and a faith community, is a gift from God. Without the power of the Holy Spirit we can do nothing good. And nothing that is just our idea and not God's will prosper. Thanks be to God, the work of the Spirit never ends. God plans to use us, in whatever circumstances we are in, to accomplish good things in the world.

But we ask, "What is God calling us to do now, during this pandemic?" It is good for us to focus on what we can do, not on what we cannot do. (1) We can continue "physical distancing" and all the other public health measures to slow the virus and care for the most vulnerable, to protect life; **(2) we can give special donations,** if we are able, to feed people who are hungry and suffering financially (checks can be made out to "First English Lutheran Church", with memo line, "Hunger," and gifts will be divided between the Whitewater Food Pantry, Community Space in Whitewater, and

ELCA Hunger Appeal). **(3) we can show our concern and care for others** with phone calls, texts, e-mails, Zoom, and other forms of social media; and **(4) we can worship online, now with a new style of worship.** Simply go on the church website, firstenglishlutheranchurch.360unite.com and then "click here to visit us on Facebook." **(5) Pray and read the Bible every day.**

And, in everything, rely on the power of God's Spirit, promised to us by our Lord Jesus.

In the Spirit's power,

Pastor Steve

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