

**Acts 1:6-14**

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, 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." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

**John 17:1-11**

After Jesus had spoken these words, he 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. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 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. (525)

There's a legend in my family. It's the legend of Jack's Jig. It's based in fact, indeed might largely *be* fact. And it's not a secret, so you might as well know it too.

It finds us at a student chorus concert in the Morris Elementary School gym. This doubles as the basketball court and it has bleachers lining the wall on the long-side of the court and the doors into the gym on the opposite long-side wall. This makes it so, if you're

not among the first to arrive to any event such as this, you have an audience for your arrival—a good reason to come early, if you ask me.

The bleachers were pulled out, fully out that day to accommodate an audience as large as it ever can. In the middle of the basketball court was a set of risers wide enough to fit the choruses that would be featured, facing the audience, back to the door, the 1st and 2nd grade chorus in which Jack would sing, and the 3rd-5th grade chorus that would have Tobias up there.

The younger chorus went first, which made evident again that the music teacher, now conducting, found Jack tough to take. He hadn't learned the chorister's demeanor of expressive face but still body in performing. He would simply dance too much to the music he was helping to make, putting on more of a show than even *he* intended to—for I think he didn't intend any of this. There were a couple times in particular when I thought the music teacher might quit her job on the spot. He wasn't behaving *badly*, he was just behaving too much.

The older chorus went next, which made evident again how very much the music teacher loved Tobias. He participated in just the right way, singing well and standing still.

But by this point, the concert had gone on for a half hour or so, and Jack, now sitting with Jesse and me in the bleachers, told us he had to go to the bathroom.

I imagine my face went white at this—for the bathroom was off the hallway across the court. And this basketball court was wide, and wide open for the audience's notice. Though the chorus of children wouldn't be able to see him cross the room, and the music teacher would only be able to see him halfway cross, the rest of the known world could watch him: cross the room, pass into the hallway, travel the distance to the bathroom door, and then, once done, make the long journey back.

Now, I know you're saying we could have just told him to wait, to "hold it," in the parlance of desperate parents everywhere. But Jack has always had a truculence about him: the firmer you insisted on something the less likely you were to get it from him. He was easier to work with than work against.

"Okay," I said, nearly breathless for need of quiet but also for growing terror. "You can go to the bathroom. Walk quietly and calmly. Walk the perimeter of the room, staying out of the way of the performance. Go to the bathroom, and then come immediately back.

Keep your eyes down. Watch only your feet as you calmly and quietly walk the perimeter back to us. Do not draw attention to yourself. There's a show going on and it isn't you."

He agreed to these terms. Seven-year old that he was at the time, he would aim to do exactly as I described, as I demanded in the most gently fierce way I could muster.

But once he was out of my reach, he was on his own.

He made it around the perimeter to the other side of the room, and the chorus kept singing and even the teacher didn't notice him. He passed into the hallway and disappeared into the bathroom. A while later, for who knows what of interest was in there, he emerged and went to the water fountain, which had his back to the room, his back to the audience that was doing well in watching the chorus concert.

But then Jack noticed the music, and he began to dance. This boy, with his shock of white blond hair and his inability to blend in, really began to move. The groove was in his heart and he had fully entered boogie wonderland, fully immersed in just dancing on his own. (Some song lyrics there.)

I dared not check in with anyone around me, turtling myself, trying to pull my own head into my neck as if this would somehow protect not just me but also Jack so far away, so exposed, and so distracting—not behaving badly, just behaving too much.

Eventually, of course, the song ended and Jack stopped dancing, which coincided with the end of the concert. The applause of the parents and grandparents filled the room and eventually everyone broke their form, came down off the risers, came down off the bleachers.

Jack's Jig, it would come to be called, and one parent out there claims yet to have video of it on her phone.

It's not often that I feel like Jesus...

We've got two takes this morning on Jesus leaving, two takes of the same event though very differently remembered: Jesus leaving, the disciples left, no longer under the protective guidance of their teacher, no longer under the empowering guidance of their teacher, now expected to do it on their own, to continue on their own.

John's Jesus seems far less open to leaving them, seems far more attached to their being attached. It's not for nothing John's gospel is often illustrated with the image of a nursing Jesus, the babe at the breast of his mother. This is a gospel insistent on the

nearness of Jesus and on the rightful dependence of the disciples on their teacher. As the baby Jesus was to Mary, so the disciples are to their teacher and friend Jesus from whom grace pours out like mother's milk, ever replenished, never exhausted.

Just so, his leaving seems marbled with worry. His prayer to God seems marbled with worry, *his* worry.

We're back in the upper room with this reading. We've spent a lot of time here in recent weeks. It is the night of Jesus' arrest, the night of his last supper with his friends. Judas has already gone out to do quickly what he was going to do, and Jesus took this time together to speak.

This word of God made flesh, this *logos* of God, the very logic and rationale and intelligibility of the whole creation, Jesus would now speak. For three chapters, he spoke to the gathered disciples of God in what's come to be called the Farewell Discourse, and now for two chapters he would speak to God of the disciples in what's come to be called the High Priestly Prayer. These are distinctive features in the Gospel of John, as is this: that Jesus prior to his arrest, crucifixion, and death seems more worried about what's to happen to his disciples than he is worried about what's to happen to him. In other gospels he's remembered to have prayed, "Father, take this cup from me." In John, it is more this: "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." Sure, Jesus would suffer the cross, but the disciples would suffer his absence, and this was an even more worrisome thing.

This suggests something strongly about the Johannine community, which I've told you about before so I'm sorry to take this time again. But it's important, that the community of believers for which and from which this gospel was written, the Johannine community might well have been more vulnerable than most in the region at the time. The Roman crackdown against the Jews was in full force. Jerusalem was under siege, and the Jews were decimated in number and sent into flight, heading for the hills. Those of the Johannine community were a subset, Jews who had come to believe in Jesus and who'd begun to follow in the Jesus way. No longer bound by the traditions of their elders, no longer held to the practices of their people, they were now ill-fitting among their villages and synagogues, and they therefore had twice the reason to flee. They would seek out one another. They

would establish new households, a new community—a found family for themselves, as in the early days of gay liberation, when people had been kicked out of their families for being gay and therefore had to find one another.

Those weren't *unhappy* times.

Nevertheless, Jesus would worry about them. They didn't fit in. In fact, they very much stuck out—and it was because of him. It was because of Jesus that these once members of tight communities now no longer had a place. And he was leaving. And he would worry: "...they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours..." he would beseech God on their behalf.

Luke's version of this same leave-taking is less intimate, and less worrisome, though I haven't always seen it that way.

And I say Luke's version because, though we're in the Book of Acts here, on the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away, this is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, a sequel if you will. The book of Acts was written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke, and whereas Jesus had been the prime mover in the Gospel of Luke, the Holy Spirit would be the prime mover in the Book of Acts. Indeed, the full name of this book is "The Acts of the Apostles," which as such would follow the apostles whom will have become empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue with Jesus' work of healing and teaching, restoring and preaching, telling of and indeed enacting the Good News of God.

The men of Galilee who were seen to be looking up toward heaven at that which was no longer there: they would return from the mount called Olivet and take up occupancy once again in that storied upper room. There they would wait, as they'd been told to do, with the others among their cohort, men and women, waiting as they'd been told to do, though for what and for how long they didn't know.

Which is quite the challenge, I've always thought.

To wait indefinitely for what you do not know is quite the challenge.

It would be ten days before what they were waiting for showed itself, an unmistakable arrival that answered both questions, what and for how long. Ten days until the Holy Spirit would arrive and take the whole city by storm.

We're in this period of waiting right now. We are amidst these ten days of waiting right now. Ascension Day comes on the 40th day after Easter, and therefore always on a Thursday, three days ago in fact. Pentecost comes (as the name might suggest) on the 50th day after Easter, which is next Sunday. And so we're amidst a ten day period of waiting, a ten day period of God's new absence.

Of course, in real ways God is never fully absent, is ever-present. The beingness of all being and all beings, God is the all the all. And yet there are also liturgical times when what's notable is the absence of God. Holy Saturday, which follows Good Friday and precedes Easter, is a liturgical moment to contemplate the aching absence of God. And these ten days also give us a time to contemplate the aching absence of God, the world's sad lack.

For though it is true that God is never utterly absent, it is also true that times of being bereft will haunt our lives, moments of being utterly bereft will cleave their way into our lives and even take up room. Honoring that has its value. Honoring all those times in your life when you have lost, when you've been left, when some fullness has now emptied itself out and all you can do is sit and sigh: this has value. This bears fruit.

That said, I always figured the disciples were bereft at Jesus' leaving, that their staring up to heaven at that which was no longer there was a sign of their sorrow and being at a loss. And maybe it was for some of them. But maybe for others, it was time and they were ready. Maybe for a few, they found it energizing, the prospect that now it was theirs to do the gospel: to teach in God's name, to build toward God's aim, to set out into this wide world, wider than their one teacher embodied and embedded could ever have gone. Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, explained it well: "By removing himself from the world, Jesus would no longer be confined to a single place or a single moment, but he would be alive in the Spirit to all people for all time."

And those people wouldn't necessarily fit in. No, in fact, those really convicted in the Jesus way would ever be exposed for living as if amidst a kingdom wholly other than this world. Which was worrisome. You want your beloveds to be safe in this world—but such worldly safety was never the point. Love to transform the world has always been the point. And this demands not conformity to the world, but living in such faith that the world all

around us and among us and within us might find its true form in grace, in love. Reformed, Transformed.

There's this split second in rowing. You're at the top of the slide, and you've just dropped your blade into the water. You're readying yourself to press, to move the boat. You think you move the oar blade through the water, but you don't. You drop the oar blade into the water and you keep it in that spot in the water and you leverage the boat from that fixed place.

There's this split second when you've dropped the blade in the water and you wait for it to load, water gathering into the well of the blade so you're ready to do the work.

We're amidst that split second. We wait for the Spirit's load.

Thanks be to God.