

Farewells: Endings and Beginnings

Intro. At bible study this week we discussed whether our experiences of farewell/goodbye are more joyful or more sad. The consensus was that more farewells were sad. Clearly that point of view was from the ones left behind. The emotion is completely different if *we* are the ones saying goodbye as we go on a cruise or fly to Hawai'i. In the scriptures today, the disciples are described as both happy and sad when the Lord ascended to heaven.

I. After these weeks of Easter hearing John's gospel, we are back to Luke. The gospel story took place in the upper room where the Lord first appeared to the disciples and then to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were still trying to recover from the shock of seeing him alive.

They rejoiced to see the Lord. He reminded them of the mission they were about to inherit from him. It was short and simple: to preach repentance, the forgiveness of sin everywhere. The Lord told to wait for the power of the Spirit which would calm all their fears and fill them with passion for the Lord. Our experiences of saying goodbye to the important people in our lives varies depending on the circumstances of the departure. Graduation from high school or from college or a move to a new job location can be both sad and joyful. They are both an ending and a beginning. The disciples were sad to see the Lord go, but happy to know what they would be doing - continuing the message of God's salvation for all.

The first disciples believed the Lord would return soon, within a few years. When he *didn't*, they

realized they had to learn to live in the “in between time,” the time after the Lord’s resurrection and before his return, whenever that would be. It could not be a passive waiting, but actively witnessing to the risen Lord.

Concl. We are living in the same in between time as the first disciples. What are *we* to do? The same thing the Lord told the disciples to do - witness to others the forgiveness and mercy of God. It doesn’t mean we have to stand on the street with a sign. We *could* do that in the right circumstance. It could happen that someone was moved to be a disciple of the Lord by a big sign. But it most often happens by seeing us actively committed to the Lord at a soup kitchen, a food pantry, a medical clinic, teaching others about the Lord - living a holy life. The disciples were *witnesses* to what the Lord said and

did; they *watched* him. After the ascension, they were told *to witness* through word and deed what the Lord had done. The change is subtle. **To *be* a witness is a noun. To *witness* is a verb. The former is passive – watching - while the latter is active - doing. We are to witness *actively* to the Lord by our lives, being as joy-filled as the disciples who said farewell to the Lord on that Ascension Day. It was not an end for them. It was a beginning. Now it is our turn to be witnesses to God’s. We can’t just stand, looking at the sky. The angels advice, “Get to work,” applies to us too.**

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

Ascension, 2022