

Normally when we read stories about Jesus, We read about his life, his death, and his resurrection from the dead. We don't often talk about what happens after Jesus is raised up from the dead. That's what this morning's reading is about. After Jesus is raised back up from his death, he spends some time with the disciples. He shows up in closed rooms and invites Thomas to touch all the broken places he suffered while dying. Jesus shows up on a lakeshore, cooking up some fish for breakfast for the hungry disciples who went back to fishing because they didn't know what else to do after Jesus died. Jesus shows up and walks with a couple of the disciples on their way to Emmaus. Halfway there, Jesus breaks bread and they recognize him.

And then Jesus goes away.

Again.

Which must have been at least a little bit heartbreaking for the disciples who just got Jesus back.

Can you imagine them asking Jesus, "why do you have to go? Why can't you stay?"

Doesn't that sound like a great plan? Especially because now that Jesus is beyond dying, he could stay here on earth forever?

And wouldn't that be wonderful? That way we could all go meet Jesus for ourselves. We could all touch his hands and his feet and we wouldn't have to take anyone else word that the whole Jesus story was true.

We wouldn't...need faith. We could see for ourselves. Prove it right then and there.

Imagine what science would do with this. We could put Jesus in a lab and study his power, maybe figure out how it works so we can use it on everyone else and there would be no cancer.

Only there might not be a lot of science since we'd already have Jesus. Nor medicines, because you know, Jesus. Right there. Just touch his cloak.

And we wouldn't have to fight over religion, like should women preach for example, because we could just go ask Jesus.

We wouldn't need the Bible because we could just go ask Jesus.

We could go ask Jesus all kinds of things like, “should I go to school?” or “What kind of a job should I go apply for?” We wouldn’t have to worry if we make the right choice or not because Jesus would be right there. Following God’s plan for our life would be simple because we could just go ask Jesus.

Actually, given that there’s around six billion people on earth right now, it might be difficult to get a moment of Jesus’ time but I’m sure he’d still be recruiting disciples. Right?

And we’d never have to decide if God exists or not. We’d never have to decide if we want to live our lives as if God exists. We never have to wonder, in the middle of the night, if God loves us even when we’re not being a good person. Because you know, Jesus.

But that is not how it worked out.

Jesus left. Again.

It was like Jesus trusted the disciples to do the right thing without him.

Which is a lot like God has always acted.

From the very beginning of our Bible, in the first chapter of Genesis - God trusts us to do the right thing. God puts humans in charge of the world, dominion over, power over everything God has created. It is our responsibility to take good care of the world and of each other.

And then God gives us free will. The freedom to choose how we act, how we care for the world and for each other - or even choose if we want to take care of the world because sometimes that is very hard work. Sometimes that means big self sacrifice.

While it is God’s will that we be good, that we would act from Love - not hate.... God lets us choose.

So - at the end of Jesus’ ministry on earth - Jesus leaves and send the disciples back to Jerusalem

And then sends the Holy Spirit - which is the presence of God in us. The Holy Spirit is God, connecting us to Jesus and to God.

The Holy Spirit that Jesus sends is the same Holy Spirit that came to Jesus when he was baptized at the beginning of his ministry. The same holy spirit that sustained Jesus in his ministry. The same Holy Spirit that connected Jesus to God now connected the disciples to Jesus and God. Instead of one Jesus trying to reach the entire world, there were now 12 some odd disciples, each one connected to God, to Jesus now at work in the world.

And then the disciples, now blessed with the Holy Spirit, start to talk to other people about God, about Jesus, and about the Holy Spirit. People who never knew Jesus became passionate about Jesus like Cornilius - a roman soldier and his whole family. He becomes blessed with the Holy Spirit and then the people the disciples talked to talked to other people and the Holy Spirit spreads out through the world. Slowly, generation by generation but now it is here, among us and within us today. This morning. (Say amen)

Here is why this is important:

The Holy Spirit makes it like Jesus actually did not go away.

Jesus remains here among us - but differently.

The Holy Spirit keeps us connected to Jesus, right now and right here.

Jesus is still here. Jesus is still among us, still teaching, still changing, still helping us see how God would have us behave.

Before Jesus sent the Holy Spirit - the disciples just watched Jesus go away. And then they keep watching the place where Jesus used to be, because they didn't know.

Watching the place where they last saw Jesus, is quite frankly, useless. Jesus isn't there any longer. The disciples are staring at nothing. And if they keep staring, they're going to miss Jesus all over again. As amazing as Jesus' ministry was, as amazing as Jesus death and resurrection was - that was all preamble. That story is past tense. That story happened - not happening. Those three years of Jesus' minister and resurrection was in fact only the warm up at for how God is at work right now in the world today.

But in order to be ready for the future, the disciples had to let go of the past.

Something brand new was coming at them like an I-C-E train moving at super speed. But they were going to miss that train if they kept staring off into the place where Jesus used to be.

The disciples had to follow Jesus' instructions and go back to Jerusalem and wait.

They had to turn their face away from the past and set their feet walking toward the future.

I think for any of us that is hard to do. It is part of our human history to hold on to the familiar because we at least understand what to expect. We might not like it but at least we know how to function within it. I think its even harder to keep adapting to big change after big change. After a while we all want to just take a break for a little bit. Go back to the old ways, the comfortable ways.

But maybe its time for those old ways to pass. Maybe the reason for the old ways disappeared - like Jesus - and now its time to go find the new gifts Jesus is sending us.

That new thing that Jesus is doing is still coming at us like a jet plane coming in for a landing on a runway. It can't stop. Its big and its fast, and its going to land and so it is with the new thing - the Holy Spirit - that Jesus is sending into the world for everyone who says yes to God.

Things happen when the Holy Spirit shows up. Some of those disciples end up traveling a long ways away from home. There's a tradition that one - Thomas - ends up in India starting new churches with the good news of the Gospel. Many a pastor friend of my has told me how they keep going to churches where they swore they'd never go and end up loving the place where they had been brought.

It is still risky to say yes to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God can invite our lives to take off in directions we didn't know they would go. But we can go in confidence that Jesus is with us now. Jesus is with us still.

Here we are this beautiful morning in Munich. For many of us, a long ways away from home and for some, this is our home. For all of us, our home right now.

What are we doing here?

Why are we here and how is God inviting us, through the Holy Spirit, to take care of the world, to take care of each other and our new neighbors.

Where are we looking? Are we searching for the last place we saw Jesus or are we getting ready for the next place where we'll change lives - with Jesus's help?

What is God calling each of us to be? To do?

What is God calling Peace Church to be? To do?

What is God calling all the churches of the United Methodist Community to be, to do this week as they gather beginning this weekend for the four year conference meeting?

The Holy Spirit is coming.

The Holy Spirit is here.

What do we chose?