

Devotion for First Week of Easter, 2021

Rev. Jeanne S. Simpson

We've celebrated the empty tomb with Alleluia's, nice Easter clothes, Easter eggs, and a good Easter meal, hopefully with family. A happy day after a season of moving toward the cross during 40 days of Lent. The cross was not victorious, and we are grateful for resurrection.

For 40 days after his resurrection on Easter Sunday, Luke tells us in the gospels that Jesus travelled and preached with his apostles, preparing them for his departure from Earth. Ascension Day marks the moment Jesus literally ascended into heaven before his disciples, at the village of Bethany, near Jerusalem. We celebrate the Ascension this year on Thursday, May 13. We don't do much with that in the Presbyterian church, but it's a huge celebration in other churches, including the Catholic and Orthodox churches. It occurs 10 days before Pentecost. Pente – meaning 50 – the 50th day after Jesus resurrection. And we know what happens on that day!

So we are in another 40 day period in Jesus' life. He spent 40 days in the wilderness, we observe Lent for 40 days of penitence and remembrance, and now there is this 40 day period where Jesus, as he tells Mary of Magdala in John, has not ascended to the Father yet. We read of various appearances during this time to Jesus' followers. We will look at several of these in the coming weeks, beginning with Doubting Thomas this Sunday.

We are once again in liminal time – that threshold time. Jesus is not dead, but he has not ascended to the Father yet either. He is wandering around showing up through locked doors, showing up on the road to Emmaus, showing up in the midst of the disciples suddenly like a ghost and scaring them half to death. And why is he doing this? Because he's not finished teaching these folks what they need to do now that he's leaving them. They've got to carry on and birth a church without him. And they need to be clear that he really did die and he really is going to ascend to heaven. And most importantly, what that resurrection means to them, and to all of humanity.

We will look at these appearances for the next six weeks, as we prepare for Pentecost. I am reminded of Paul's declaration in Romans 6: "How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

So walk this week in this newness of life – this glorious realization that Jesus' resurrection is for us – as recipients of his mercy and love and forgiveness. And be brave with your testimony – like Mary of Magdala.

Jeanne

