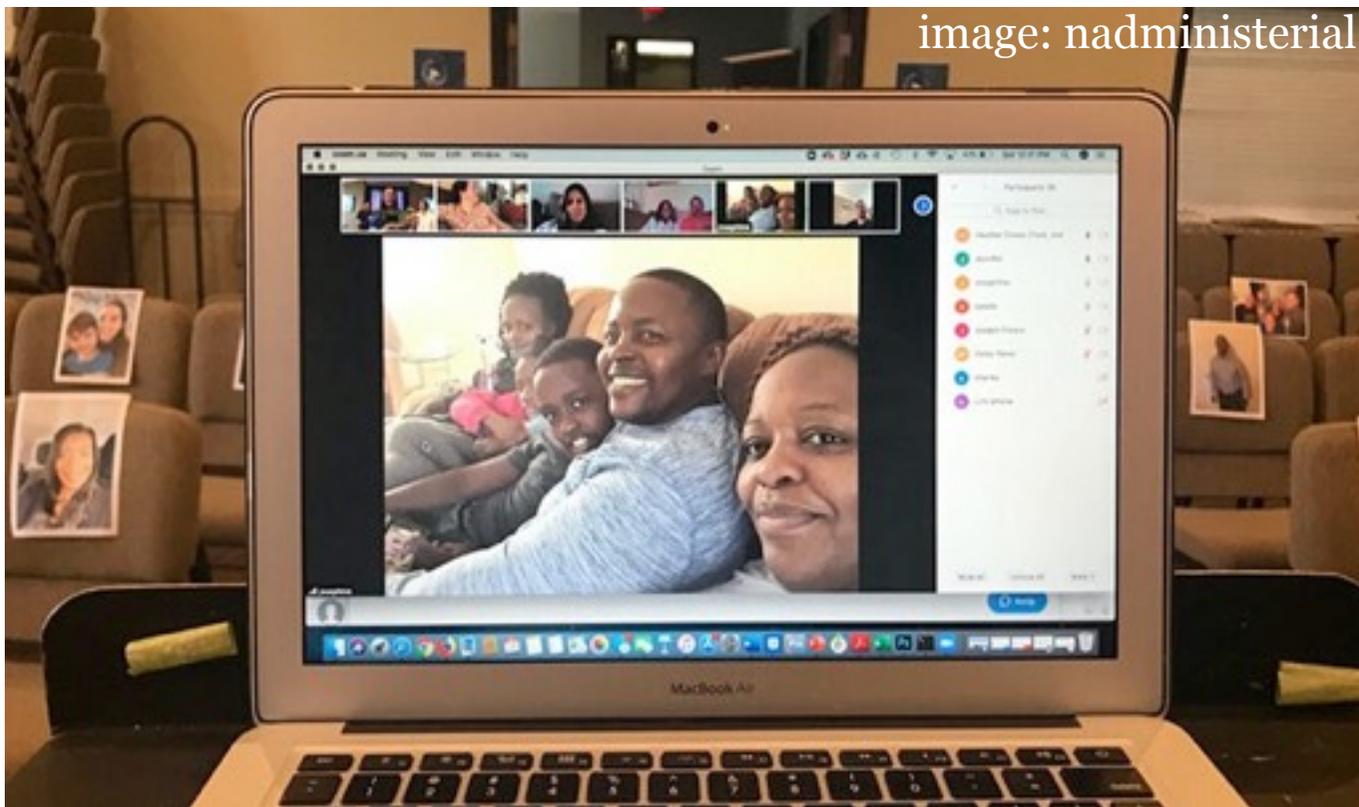


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CONCORD
SUNDAY
SCHOOL

LECTIONARY
LESSON 21

SUNDAY,
MAY 24, 2020

Acts 1:6-14 NRSV

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 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." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 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." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away.

13 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. 14 All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Background

We have been journeying through the book of Acts as we get closer to Pentecost. This book contains dynamic tales of how people responded to the Story of Jesus. In the chapter we will read today, we get a taste of what people witnessed in Jesus' Ascension. After spending 40 days among the people and "speaking about the Kingdom of God," Jesus was lifted up and a "cloud took him out of their sight"(Acts 1:9).

In your own devotional period this week, take some time to read the entire first Chapter of Acts. If you were part of Jesus' community during these times, how would you feel about his ascension into heaven? Would you be hopeful about his return?

Today's lesson will focus on holding onto the heart of holy traditions.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. How has your faith walk been impacted by our city's recommendations to stay at home? Has your prayer life changed? If so, in what ways?

What's happening during this passage?

Jesus, at this point, has been through everything humans have been through... and then some! He was born, he lived, he died. And then, he resurrected. After his resurrection, he spent 40 days speaking on Earth. At this moment, the disciples asked, "are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They want to know if they'll return to normal and if the good old days will start again. After all, Jesus is back! But Jesus tells

them, “it’s not really your business. It’s the Father’s business and it’s by His power. But you’ll be able to vouch for me, whether you’re in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and everywhere on Earth.” After giving the people this last direction, he was lifted up and into the sky by a cloud. His command to them

As those gathered were staring into the sky, two men in white robes appeared. They ask, “Men of Galilee, why are you looking up toward heaven? Jesus will return as you saw him go.”

Then the people go on a journey to Olivet. When they got to the city, they went to the room upstairs. Recorded in this room are “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,” and “certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.” Must be a big room! (We’ll come back to this later.)

Who are these men in robes?

The two men in white robes notice that the disciples are just staring into the sky. They help the disciples reorient their perspective. Instead of staring into the sky and being in awe of the miracle of the ascension, the two men in robes remind the disciples that Jesus will return “in the same way.” These men in robes helped the disciples focus on what was important.

While they were once staring into space and watching Christ ascend like one may watch a lost balloon, the men in robes brought them back to reality. The work of Christ is not in the sky alone. The work of Christ is among our fellow humans.

How many people were in that upstairs room? For what?

The writer of Acts gives a partial attendance sheet for those present.

There’s

- Peter
- John
- James
- Andrew
- Philip
- Thomas
- Bartholomew
- Matthew,
- James son of Alphaeus
- and Simon the Zealot

- Judas son of James (a different person than the Judas who betrayed Jesus)
- Mary the mother of Jesus
- Jesus' brothers.

That's a lot of people. They all gathered in the "hyperōon," or the "upstairs room." This room was the highest part of the house, often where people would go for prayer and meditation. After the emotional whirlwind of witnessing Jesus ascend into heaven, these people ascend in their own way to the upstairs room. They all spend time together "devoting themselves to prayer." We do not have much written evidence or dialogue to fill out the story here, but what we do know is that these followers came together in prayer.

What kind of prayers might these people have prayed?

Even though Jesus is gone (in the physical sense), his followers still gather in meaningful ways. They take a break from gazing into the sky and waiting for him, prompted by the mysterious men in white robes. They remember that they still have each other. Given all that has happened in the last few days, perhaps they prayed for clarity. Guidance. Purpose. Focus. For safe travels. For smooth meetings. For their emerging leaders. For the vulnerable in their midst. Perhaps they missed Jesus. Perhaps they still, quietly asked for Jesus to come back. Given all that happened in this passage, what do you think they prayed about?

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today's World

In the classic children's story "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," the Grinch went out of his way to take the magic out of Christmas. He stole every gift and decoration, only to hear that the people of Whoville

still woke up to sing their communal song in the morning. He was puzzled. “It came without ribbons,” he said. “It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags.” Even with all their materials gone, the Whos came to the town square to sing. Christmas came anyway.*

This story remains a family favorite for generations because of its timeless message. Even when we don’t get the thing we thought we would, having each other is important. We can replace gifts. We cannot replace each other. The Whos show us that even when the world around



image: Wiki Fandom

us is changing drastically and we wake up to bare trees, we can still find ways to sing together.

This past Sunday, we were blessed to have a presentation of “Let Mount Zion Rejoice.” Through a global Zoom outage, we found

some way to “devote ourselves to prayer” and song. We may feel like a Cosmic Grinch in the form of our national leadership is stealing our joy. We may find ourselves in the same position as the disciples, looking up to the sky as we set our gaze on the ascending Christ. But God calls us to look out for our fellow human.

We can come together to sing a little differently than the Whos in the town square. We can all sing along from our homes, in our Zoom-Squares as Brother Kwame streams the recording. And certainly, as we learned on Sunday, God still moves through the sound-waves. Our holy traditions may look different these days, but they can still be meaningful. What makes them work is a concern for those around us. No need to watch the sky for Christ’s return; we can feel his presence right where we are.

* Min. Jene Ashley Colvin, 2020.

Journal: Imagine that you are one of the people in the upstairs room. What would you pray for?

Closing: Sing along. “Having You There,” Mississippi Mass Choir.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqUW05Ti_fo

Chorus:

*We have come to praise and magnify the Lord
For all that He has done
And for the victories we have won
In the good times and in the bad times
In the happy times and in the sad times
Having You there made the difference
Just having You there*

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are everywhere. Even though Jesus is not physically present with us, you remind us to look out for evidence of your glory.

God, it can be so easy to think you're in the sky somewhere. Thank you for the reminder that you are among us. In the sound of laughter, in our tears, in our zoom-worship greetings, in our prayer. Your Spirit transcends time and space.

Help us to remain devoted to prayer. We need to communicate our needs, joys, fears and stories to you even more these days. May we be a help to the people in our homes and in our neighborhoods.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen