

Reflection and Blessing

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

September 24, 2023

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The Book of Acts, Chapter 1, vv. 10 – 14 – Jesus Risen

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

¹² Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. ¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Reflection

This is the beginning of the Book called “The Acts of the Apostles”, the sequel to the Gospel of Luke, by the same Storyteller, Luke. Jesus has died, but they discover the empty tomb, Jesus surprises them by appearing, on a journey towards Emmaus, and then once again in the Upper Room.

The Book of Acts begins as the Gospel of Luke ended, with great expectations among Jesus' friends, men and women. They ask him if this is the time when the kingdom will come – the glorious restoration of God's vision. Just before his dramatic ascension, Jesus proclaims that it is not for them to know God's timing, but that time will come when the Spirit will be upon them in Jerusalem. But they need to wait.

The disciples, eager to get going. Jesus says, you need to wait prayerfully. Then Jesus rises, and they are awe-struck. The angelic figures in robes suddenly appear, noticing the shock, the awe, the disorientation of those gathered. They are assured that Jesus is not gone, but he will meet them in Jerusalem.

The dramatic event in Luke – inspired, the followers of Jesus want to do something dramatic. But they are instructed to wait for God's time. Then again, a dramatic moment as Jesus ascends. They are to go back to Jerusalem and wait.

We have had our own share of dramatic moments around us here at St. Andrew's. We today look back at a rich and long history as St. Andrew's. We have been changed, transformed, by moments in our history, the crucible, the refining fire challenges us to speak truth, to listen attentively for the Spirit speaking in those around us. Making faithful decisions.

What are our dramatic developments that have been like refining fire for St. Andrew's in these more recent years? We, like so many congregations, are not as we once were. Truth be told, we are never the same as we were, we are always changing. We are not as we were – as we, like those disciples, wait for Spirit to be upon us, as we are eager

to get doing something that we hope will change things, we listen for Christ's voice telling us that Creator, Christ presence, Spirit is indeed with us.

What dramatic things have happened outside this St. Andrew's space? There has been great change, and that has impacted us. We are inclined to look upward, look back at what was to inform where we are going. But we are here, now. In this present moment, entrusted with this gift of St. Andrew's, the building, the residents who are the St. Andrew's Place community. The neighbourhood outside has changed, but I see faces and circumstances of the people that Jesus went off the beaten path to help in the people I meet outside this building, as I see them in front of me, in you and me, as we, a little anxiously ask, "What's next God?"

I invite us to ask that question now.

Blessing

From the Iona community:

The love of the faithful Creator,
The peace of the wounded Healer,
The joy of the challenging Spirit,
The hope of the Three-in-One
surround and encourage us
today, tonight, and forever.
May the blessing of God – the Creator, the Healer,
and the Spirit,
be with us and remain with us always. Amen.

(Source: The pattern of our days – Iona)