

1 Peter 4: 12-14, 5: 6-11
Acts 1: 6-14
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
June 1, 2016

This morning we enter a poignant moment in the life of Jesus' closest disciples. They have endured the agony, fear and remorse of Jesus' crucifixion and death. They have been overwhelmed and utterly disoriented by his resurrection from the dead. They have known his blessed company in the month that has followed. And now has come the moment when he really is leaving. Yes Jesus promises to return. But he is quite evasive on that point. He refuses to give an exact time or date. His one firm promise is that soon—again no exact date—they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will empower them to witness to the world about him.

There is immediacy about this promise of the Holy Spirit which will move the disciples to return to Jerusalem and anticipate this gift. This will not be passive thumb twirling waiting—not the waiting lampooned by existentialist playwright Samuel Beckett in Waiting for Godot. This will be active intentional waiting. It will be a time of prayer, singing and mutual encouragement. It will be a time of preparing the heart so that when the promised Holy Spirit comes there will be fertile ground. It is like the two farmers in a drought. One who does nothing and figures he will plow the ground and plant when the rains come; while the other digs the furrows and prepares the ground so that *when the rains come all will be ready*.

Yet, as I said at the beginning there is a poignant, painful moment. They must first say good bye. They must deal with the fact that Jesus is really leaving. This time he is not going to another place on earth. He is ascending to heaven. The disciples try to engage Jesus with

questions in a vain attempt to detain him with words. Yet even as he speaks he is taken from them. They behold him receding into the sky. They look as this beloved figure contracts from a recognizable human form to a tiny dot in the clouds. They maintain their fixed gaze willing the speck to remain knowing that Jesus is truly gone and that more likely that spot is at best a high flying bird gliding against a far, far distant cloud. And even then, their gaze does not waver until they hear the voices of two men telling them to stop looking for Jesus in the sky and begin the ministry of active intentional waiting.

Friends, I believe that the Sunday *before* Pentecost is critical to our experience of the living presence of Jesus given in the Holy Spirit. How many of us think that waiting to receive the gift of the living Spirit of Jesus is a matter of empty waiting for something to happen? How many of us have made peace with the dead spots in our souls and are simply resigned to live half-lives of “Oh well....”

This is a painful truth for me. For years I was told that I had the gifts to be a great youth pastor, a great preacher a pastor who had so much *potential*. Then one by one I experienced the pain of disappointing people, of not being the one they expected me to be. I believe this sense of failure fueled my dependence on alcohol. The pain of being a disappointment to myself and others was just too much.

So today I am challenged by the hope that this morning we do not come resigned. I pray that we trusting that there is blessing in the wind. I ask the God who promises to be faithful to liberate us from lives of quiet despair, not only in our personal lives but with regard to the suffering around the world and in our own communities. With the psalmist may we this day find *the goodness of the Lord* not in some future after we die, *but right here in the land of the*

living: a goodness which is offered us in this simple meal of bread and grape juice. As we share this meal which links us directly with Jesus' meal with the disciples on the night of his arrest, let this be a proclamation of faith, hope and love. Let us take the time to remember with the Apostle Paul, that as we eat this bread and drink from this cup we proclaim the Lord's death and the life that has flowed from his death until he comes. Amen.