

### **Pastor Roy's Sermon from May 28, 2017 (Outdoor Service-Easter 7)**

This past Thursday was Ascension Day. That is the day the church remembers Jesus saying goodbye for the final time. Ascension Day is a day of closure. They will not meet Jesus walking around on earth any more—but the Spirit of Jesus will always be with them (and us) and will never depart. So though he is not physically present, he is spiritually present. A pair of angels tell the disciples, he will return as he has departed. They are not alone—not abandoned. The Spirit of Jesus is in them and around them. He now lives on earth in them. His life, death, and resurrection reveal that death is not to be feared. Our trouble is a passing trouble—at times overwhelming—pain—emotional, physical, spiritual. Jesus knew the pain too. But he also knew the joy of communing in God's presence. He knew the comfort of union with God.

The story of Christ's ascension reminds us to trust in God's presence and communion. Invest, plan for, and rest in what we share with all the living which find God as their source.

John remembers Jesus praying about unity with God. It's startling that Jesus doesn't make a big distinction between what's true of him and what is also true of us—in his relationship with God and our relationship with God. What Jesus was doing we will also do. We are doing what Jesus did.

Jesus proclaims to his followers that the nature of God is all around them and within them. Believing this/ accepting this is what it means to trust. It's all we have to do. Trust. We believe that the nature of God is at work in creation, in humanity, in all that is. I'm not saying it's easy, but it is true and this gives us hope. Grounding.

John also remembers Jesus talking about the name of God and that it protects his followers as it has protected him. Just to clarify, Jesus was crucified, and though, in his crucifixion Jesus feels abandoned, he is not, of course, abandoned. Resurrection and Ascension are our way of saying, Jesus is fine—even though he died. Jesus' deep, profound trust in God set him free to live—to live freely filled with a deep abiding trust. The only important thing is that everything is ok because all is made one in God, all are united in God who draws all things to God. What is the name of God?

The closest we can come to the Hebrew understanding of God's name YHWH, is "I am." What matters in life is this name, "I am." Jesus shared in this name, "I am" and it protected him from fear, and led him to a deep trust in God's presence. Paul celebrates this reality in his epistles—we read it strongly in Ephesians called the Indwelling Christ/the universal Christ Spirit.

Jesus calls us to discipline our minds with this mind of Christ. We listen. We learn to trust in the Abundance of creation and God's mercies. Deep trust in "I am." With our finances. Health. What everyone else thinks of us. How long we live. Friends. Our children. Parents. Beloved endeavors and beloved congregations. We worry about these things. The name of God, the mind of Christ calls us to release our worries and trust instead.

All of these things have been gathered into the compassionate embrace of eternity/the peace of rest in the Spirit of Christ. We are free! Free to live, to love with abandon.

And this weekend we remember those who have gone before us, ultimately trusting, yes imperfectly, but trusting in the mercy of shared hope and sacrifice for the common good. In the words of Jesus, "and 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." We are witnesses of God's presence, love, mercy, and peace.

We go forth bearing witness, with deeds of kindness and mercy. We are with God, in God, and all is united in God's presence for joy. Amen.