

Rev. George Arceneaux

Feast of the Ascension

5/12/2024

Friends, this morning, I'm starting off with the point. The point of the Ascension reading. The point of baptism. The point, Wren, and Willa, as her sister, I hope you hold onto as we baptize Wren. And that point is this: you will always be loved.

No equivocating, no qualification, no ifs, ands, or buts. Wren, you. And hey everybody else here. You are always loved.

This is the foundation of our faith, of our religion, of our God and of the sacrament of baptism. And its also something that is really easy to forget. Life can be strange and hard and we can forget that we are loved as we're swept hither and yon by circumstance.

And the story of the Ascension of Jesus which we read today is so good at reminding us that we can so easily be distracted by life and we can forget that we are both loved and called continually to love.

I consider this morning with our readings, the example of but one of Jesus' disciples: Simon Peter. The man who lived about 2000 years ago in the middle east, and who's day job was fishing. The man who was out working with his brother one day as some 30 year old guy he'd never met before in his life approached and said, "hey, I've got an exciting business opportunity, I see you here fishing here for fish, but have you ever considered fishing for people?" Peter, rather than respond with what I imagine would have been a more conventional response like, "huh, that's a weird thing to say" decided instead, to trust the strange fellow. Yet its this random guy that came out of nowhere that Peter came to love more than anyone and who made him feel more loved than any he'd ever met.

They did wondrous things together as Simon saw his friend walk on water, heal the sick, and even rise from the dead until a day came when Simon's friend said he needed to leave. And he said goodbye, and then flew into space like Superman. And as Peter looks into the sky trying to see where his friend went and wondering if he could always fly, two men in white robes ask why he's looking up to heaven because that's not where his friend is.

Now, given all the things that Simon Peter saw Jesus do, we might forgive these two guys in white robes for what they say to Simon Peter. Again, Jesus did stuff like turn water into wine and literally fight and defeat death, but flying is a bridge too far?

Then again, have any of YOU ever seen your best friend fly up into the clouds to never be seen again?

Of course, the Gospel as a whole and this story in particular today are meant, more than anything, to teach us. And the lesson I at least hear from the two men in white who speak to Peter and the other disciples is that they're not meant to look up to the heavens for their friend. They're meant to go back to where they live and back to the work Jesus had spent his time teaching them to do. To love.

Like Peter looking to the heavens, I know I can be distracted from love and I wonder if it might be the same for you. That any of us might be distracted by our appearance and say we're unlovable for how we look, or be distracted by an unkind word thrown at us by another who's having a bad day and believe less of ourselves. We can be on the opposite side of that spectrum and think that because of our successes we're better than another person. And, sure, I don't know how many of us have seen friends fly into the sky, by life is messy and random and just as unexpected with as many experiences that can distract us from what we celebrate in every baptism ever done and most especially in the baptism we get to be witness to today with Wren and her family.

So again I say, Wren, no matter what life throws your way, no matter what crazy, wacky, and wonderful things you'll do and experience in your life, you are always loved. And we're all going to promise in just a few minutes that we'll do our best to be there for you as we remember our own baptisms. Above all though, even if those around you may be just as distracted as Peter was looking up at the heavens, because sometimes that'll happen, God will always be there for you.