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St. Timothy's Episcopal Church  
Calhoun, Georgia  
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**7 Easter, Year "A":** Acts 1: 6-14; Psalm 68:1-10,33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

**Title: A Father's Farewell**

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Today is the last Sunday of the Easter season. Let us take this opportunity to consider where we are in the Great Story – the story of how God was, is, and always will be with us.

In our Gospel text this morning we find Jesus and the disciples gathered in the upper room. It's sort of like Jesus has rented the local community meeting room for the night in which to gather with his friends. And it is upstairs – thus we have come to refer to this place of final meeting as the 'upper room.'

And Jesus has gathered his disciples for one last teaching. One last message. One last conversation. One last shot, if you will, at saying to them, relating to them who he is and what has been his purpose; and what his life, ministry, and his coming death will mean to the world. It is a moment in time something not unlike the father who lies in his deathbed and has gathered his children around him to say to them what he feels is most important for them to hear. These will be Jesus' last words to his children and by extension to us as well.

And Jesus sort of says, "My children, I have done my best by you. With God's help, I have taught, I have said those things to you, I have demonstrated to you that which is most important for you to know, for you to embrace, for you to share with the world. And so go now and live your lives with my voice echoing in your ears; my persona an always and everywhere reality. Go now and do those things that I have taught you to do. Go now and be the persons I have called you to be, loving one another, and sharing what you know with the world. And after Jesus has said all that he wants to say, he concludes with a prayer for their well-being and, by extension, for the work that they have been given to do in the building of the church. The final words are also a kind of blessing over the family:

The disciples may not fully understand all that Jesus has said to them. They may not fully understand why Jesus must do what he has to do – giving himself over to be crucified. They may not fully understand what Jesus would have them do after he leaves them, but they know that they have been loved. And they know they have been prayed over.

So now, let us move forward some forty days. The meeting in the upper room is over and all hell has broken loose. Jesus has been crucified, died, and buried. But we also know that, quite remarkably, in the ensuing forty days, he has appeared to many. But now, in this moment, the

apostles, these same core disciples, are gathered with Jesus at Mount Olivet, near Bethany -- a day's journey from Jerusalem.

And we can't help but notice that even in this moment, the apostles are still asking, "Lord, now is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?"

And Jesus answers, for the umpteenth and final time, in effect saying, "Dear ones, such things are not your concern. But know this: You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit. You will be equipped to do the things I have given you to do. And you will be empowered to live your lives in the moment – not worried so much about outcomes, but rather just about being faithful. For that is all you can do and that is all that I ask.

And then..... Jesus is gone.

And the apostles find themselves staring into an empty sky, standing with two men, surely angels, who say, "What you guys looking at up there?"

And you can almost hear the apostles, still staring into heaven, saying, "Well, Jesus. Jesus was just there."

And the angels say, "Yeah, we know. But he's not there now. He's coming back, but for now didn't he tell you to wait on the coming of the Holy Spirit and then, and only then, to be prepared to get on with the work he has given you to do.

And so the little band of disciples returns to Jerusalem. In fact, they return to the very upper room where it all began. This upper room which apparently has become not only their place of meeting, but arguably their church as well. And we see that their numbers are beginning to swell. Jesus' mother and brothers are there as well as 'some women' we are told. Even now the number of those who are drawn to the Jesus Movement is beginning to grow. And they are obedient. They wait. They wait for the coming of the Spirit – though surely they know not exactly what this means.

They may have hoped for, anticipated a more pro-active charge. But they have been told to wait. And they come to understand that even in the waiting there is power. Even in the waiting there is movement. Even in the waiting there is participation in God's plan.

But let it not also be lost on us that in Jesus' farewell there not only are instructions to wait and a prayer for protection, but also an appeal to unity.

Last week I spoke of Jesus 'use of the word abide when speaking of the relationship and the reality of the Holy Spirit that is with us and within us. And I said that the word abide is closely related to the word REside. That is, when Jesus is talking about abiding in us and we in him, he is not talking about where we live. He is not talking about an address. He is talking about where our hearts are, and our mind, our priorities, and that which has to do with our day-to-day.

When Jesus talks about our abiding with Him and with our Father who is in heaven he is talking about a relationship that suggests an intimacy and mutuality that is so strong and interrelated that life itself is associated with, if not dependent upon it.

I think that when Jesus was praying for unity of the church he presumed and was, in fact, also praying for a continuing unity of spirit that resides in the heart as that which undergirds unity within the church – the community that would coalesce around him following his death and resurrection.

In reality, the church had hardly begun before there began to appear conflict and differences of opinion. Paul had a falling out of sorts with his brother-in-Christ, Barnabus, on how best to proceed in taking the Good News to the churches.<sup>1</sup> He also had a major disagreement with the church in Jerusalem over how Jewish one must be in order to be a Christian. The conflict was eventually resolved more or less in Paul's favor, but it was a thing that had to be worked out. But the church held together, unified by common purpose.

And we know that the issues long and tenaciously debated at the first four ecumenical councils having to do with coming to consensus around the divinity of the Christ and the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Godhead were hard fought. But the church held together.

Paul takes up this subject of church unity in his letters to the Ephesians and his First Letter to the Corinthians. Therein Paul makes the point that unity is not the same thing as uniformity. And Paul will say, that to have the fellowship of the Spirit, the saints are not required to see things exactly the same way, but rather that each should have the same '*way of thinking*' that was in Christ Jesus. Very, very important distinction.

And, as we know, the church has since divided into many denominations. Unity it seems is a hard thing to maintain. I am reminded of the woman who went to the post office near Christmas and asked for some stamps with a Yuletide theme. The clerk responded by asking what denominations she desired. To which the woman responded, "Oh, good heavens! Has it come to this? Well, all right, give me 20 Baptist and 20 Catholic ones."

And so there were issues in Paul's day and there have been issues and conflicts up to and including our own day.

Obviously, the kingdom that we pray for, the kingdom that we live for, the kingdom that we lean into, the kingdom that we anticipate, the kingdom where love and charity reign paramount has not yet arrived. But we anticipate its coming. And we anticipate a world, a universe that is ever more successful in the seeking of the good, the common good, the Great Good. The Peaceable Kingdom. God's kingdom right here on earth..

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 15: 36-41

But in the meantime God calls us be about the work he has given us to do and, after that, God calls on us to wait. And that sometimes means – no, surely it always means waiting for, listening for, and leaning into the urging and the voice of the Holy Spirit.

*Veni Sancti Spiritus. Come Holy Spirit. Veni Sancti Spiritus.*

*Amen*