

Thursday was the Day of the Ascension. Forty days after the resurrection Luke's Book of Acts tells us Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, was lifted up and taken out of sight on a cloud. Not, however, before he promises they will receive power through the Holy Spirit, which is the gift of Pentecost, 10 days later. Or next Sunday for us.

Imagine what it must have been like for the disciples to wait, with hope and maybe a little fear. This was a liminal time, an in-between time. No doubt that is why on their return to Jerusalem they devoted themselves to prayer.

We proclaim "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." This, too, is in-between time; two thousand years' worth. A time, Jesus tells the disciples, that will stretch as long as God has set. Yet, with faith, we recite this every week, trusting and believing that God's plan will come to fruition, signaled by the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Here, on the seventh Sunday of Easter, we are invited to consider how we are to live in this in-between time, the already-not yet of Jesus' coming again; to usher in the fullness of God's kingdom, which we can only now live into partially.

As the bishop pointed out two weeks ago, and was true both last and this week, while we are still in Eastertide our readings bring us back to the hours before Jesus' death and resurrection. Today we are invited to eavesdrop on Jesus' prayer for his disciples as the hour of his death draws near.

I think I've shared this with you before. Many years ago, as my friend Barbara was dying, she gathered her two young children to her and instructed the older to watch the younger, to hold his hand crossing the street; to keep him in sight at the beach. There was an urgency to her words just as there was to Jesus' words to his disciples, heard the last two weeks, and then in this prayer today.

Is prayer one of the ways we wait in these in-between times? Is prayer what gives us strength and courage to straddle life in this world while we strive to live in God's kingdom, even now? That's what Jesus did. That's what the disciples did. Their prayer is a good model for us. And the best prayer we have is the one Jesus taught us. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven." Even as we wait, there should be an urgency in our prayer.

The description of Jesus' ascension into heaven gets us thinking about a place – a place to aspire to – a goal to attain. What if heaven is not a direction, but a state of being, meant to begin now, not wait for at some distant time? Our confession of sin is followed by the words of absolution, "keep us in eternal life." That's present tense. That opens the possibility of eternal life, kingdom life, available to us even now. We simply have to choose it. And there is urgency in making this choice.

This choice, I believe, is what God is waiting for us to make. To live as fully as we can, in this age, no matter how broken the world, as we can, even now.

Remember my Venn diagram? Here is the world. Here is God's kingdom. Someday, at a time of God's choosing, we will live fully in God's kingdom of unconditional love, peace, justice. But for

now, we live in-between the two, as best we can. We are in the in-between times, that liminal space that exists between the incarnation of Jesus and the coming again of Christ. Fortunately, we do not do this alone.

In our opening prayer we prayed together, “Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us.” Strengthen us for this difficult task of straddling two worlds, the one of our own making and the perfect creation of God’s.

In the first letter of Peter, we get more advice about how to live as intentionally and authentically as we can in God’s kingdom despite the many pushes and pulls of the world. “Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert.” We are not alone in this. The Spirit is with us. The Spirit Jesus promised would come to lead us and enliven our faith during the in-between times in which we live. And the Spirit shows us the way.

We love one another – as Christ loves us, we love. No exceptions. We are a community of the faithful in a world full of beloved children of God. There is an urgency to loving as fully as we can, with the power to redeem brokenness and restore us to new and holy life together.

We refuse to participate, perpetuate, and benefit from all injustice, and work for justice in a world that can be very unjust. There is an urgency to this, because as long as brokenness persists it becomes normative, and that is counter to the world God created for us to live in.

We Pray. Pray for peace. If everyone did there would be no one left to wage war. Like the starfish on the beach, cast back into the sea, one life saved at a time, we restore the world. There is clearly urgency in this.

Next Sunday as we celebrate the Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit that strengthens us to do these things, we renew our baptismal vows, and name the responsive behaviors we offer because God generously and graciously loves us unconditionally, and mercifully. This is no liturgical accident, but rather the bridge that will allow us to live intentionally and honestly in that liminal space between the already and not yet of God’s sacred kingdom, here on earth, as it is in heaven.

So wear red and join as a community to worship the God who refuses to leave us comfortless during these in-between times full of their own hope and promise. Thanks be to God.