

Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church
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Newark, Delaware

Psalm 47
Luke 24:44-53

“Too Much of a Good Thing”

I went to a party recently – cake and ice cream ... with strawberries too. And chocolate sauce and whipped-cream. Later I admitted ... that was too much of a good thing. Has that thought ever crossed your mind?

Or how about this ... The speaker goes on and on. Much more detail than you wanted to know. (certainly I’m not referring to any Head of Christiana sermon) Later, you confide ... well it was interesting ... but just too much of a good thing. Does that ring a bell for you?

A couple of weeks ago we went to an organ and piano concert. It was lovely ... but for me ... too much of a good thing.

Of course, when the rich dessert is finished ... and I have loosened my belt ...

And the speaker has said “finally” and means it – and sits down ...

And the music is over and the applause fades away...and I check my watch and shake my head ...

...Yes ... all too much of a good thing.

But probably we will be back ...

Back to the desert table, though perhaps this time we will opt for sugar-free or fresh fruit ...

Back to a speaker, lured by a more profound hope that we will learn something new/even gain a fresh, life changing perspective ...

back to the concert hall – or sanctuary hoping that we will be stirred by music that reaches deep into our soul.

We long for and appreciate these special moments. These occasions in our lives. And we are comfortable with them. Though perhaps a little bloated.

Sad, perhaps, that there wasn't something more.

But we have learned to live with lesser expectations, fading dreams and reduced energy. We've learned to live with simple survival.

We have been living with Jesus' followers these past 7 weeks of Eastertide. We feared all was lost as we stood at a distance and saw him die a hideous death. We scattered, afraid the authorities would drag us off too.

The women ventured-out to the tomb on the third day to anoint Jesus' body ... They returned with astonishing news – “We have seen the Lord”

Then Jesus appeared where they were gathered – “Peace,” he welcomed.

And during these past weeks he has walked with them and talked with them. Gave them instructions ... challenged them ... Fed them down at the lake shore.

These 7 weeks with Jesus' full attention have been the most wondrous weeks of all.

Perhaps, even too much of a good thing. Jesus, their Master ... so close ... so intimate.

But perhaps in the splendor of those weeks – in the precious times they enjoyed with their dear friend and Master, the fellowship hours, the stories they reveled in hearing again and again ... and telling yet again yet there were deeper truths yet to be revealed ... more magnificent challenges.

Jesus reminds and Luke records-- *“Listen ... repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed in my name to **all nations**, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ **You are witnesses of these things.** ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from

them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple praising God. (Luke 24:47-53)

Simple words: “Jesus was carried into heaven, “He ascended into heaven. Simple ... and mysterious. Simple words: “Repentance and forgiveness will be proclaimed to all nations. “You are my witnesses.”

The promise is that Jesus will come again. But for the livable future, clouded memory obscures his presence. He is obscured too by the shaky interpretations of those who try to remember and pass along what he said and did. And who attempt to explain what it all means.

The historical Jesus is gone. He’s not with us like he was with the disciples. He will never be again as followers embark on this mission to all nations.

In some ways, Ascension Day is like the first day of Ordinary time. It’s the time in-between.

We confess that Jesus has ascended to the right hand of God. Jesus has gone into the future. And in the future he bends our days toward justice and peace: Jesus goes ahead of us into eternity, where all will one day be gathered.

And that is all mysterious and seems to be good. Yet Ascension Day, (Ascension Sunday) feels a little like the day after the party. The day after visitors have packed up and driven away. It’s the day to wash the sheets and put away the special dishes. It’s the day for the walk back to Jerusalem.

There’s sadness and uncertainty in his ascension. Just seven weeks earlier there was the great excitement of Easter and then days of Jesus walking and eating and worshiping with us ... but now comes confusing absence. Jesus gone.

But both Jesus’s presence and absence are bound together in the life of faith. We love the power and the directness of Easter – lilies and tulips, grand organ, flute and violin and hymns and appearances from behind closed doors.

But there is something within us that knows we cannot

take that every day ... It can indeed become too much of a good thing.

We need space to stare at cloudy skies...
 we need moments to wonder if our experience is really/deeply true.
 We need the long walk back to the house.
 The opportunity to listen to another.
 We need absence as much as we need presence.

A colleague recounts, "Recently a member sat in my office and said he just couldn't feel anything anymore. He wanted to feel Jesus. He wanted to know that Jesus was really alive. Instead, he whispered, I just sit in church and feel ... alone."

His pastor recalled, "I wanted to assure him that he is not alone ... that we were with him.
 That the ascended and reigning Christ held his future.
 But I knew that was too quick an answer ... it didn't honor his deep loneliness.
 All I could muster was, "Sometimes life is like that."

But I'm believing that the ascension teaches us to trust these moments – these spaces between experiences. These are the places where new history is possible ... where renewal pulses, eager to be unleashed ... where we can hear a new thing or two ... Where we can sense nudges of new opportunity.

In these moments we may find ourselves beginning again, changed, renewed, perhaps more faithful.
 There are times when Jesus has to leave us so that we can figure out how to carry light ourselves ... or to carry that light with brothers and sisters.
 We need Jesus' absence in order to discover the power of Easter life within us.

Yes, the ascension of Jesus opened the pathway for disciples to move into a power-filled future.
 Immediately following the resurrection and in their weeks

together with Jesus ... it was a very cozy, amazing, wonder-filled time up there in Jerusalem, and over to Galilee, familiar haunts. On reflection, you might say, it was becoming too much of a good thing.

But they have a higher calling.

They are moving from being disciples ... that is, learners of the Way. To being Apostles – men and women who are **SENT**. Now GUIDES on the way. APOSTLES.

THOSE WHO ARE PRACTICING THE WAY.

SENT with a message/a Way of living called Good News to take into the world.

Starting in Jerusalem, and spreading out into Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Even across oceans and up the Delaware River ... then up this branch named Christina – to this cove and countryside we now know as Head of Christiana.

And what here? – what now? – 308 years from our planting – with living roots extending back some 2000 years?

I have an idea. Nothing off the wall. Nothing new fangled. Let us simply claim our place among the disciples and apostles

.... Learners of the ways of Jesus and those sent to spread the way of Jesus. (actually, they are all the same people) To spread love, to bring light, to bear forgiveness, to touch in ways that heal, to welcome generously.

That's exactly who we are. And that is our mission.

Please turn to the front page of your worship bulletin. And let us remember and affirm together our mission:

“Motivated by our love of Christ and neighbors we follow God through:

Word – *engaging preaching, worship and study*

Work – *caring service to our community and beyond*

Witness – enthusiastic hospitality for all people

*Supported by the wisdom of those who have gone before us,
worshipping here at the headwaters of Christiana Creek*

*We look joyfully to the future
of God's church in this community."*

That is a mighty calling. A glorious mission. And I assure you
... that commitment ... that work ... **will NEVER be too much
of a good thing.**