



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER \* THE SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION \* YEAR B MAY 16, 2021,

ACTS 1:15-17, 21-26; 1 JOHN 5:9-13; JOHN 17:6-19; PSALM 1

## WHERE DID JESUS GO?

*“As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”*

*“And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world.”*

—John 17:18 & 11

Where did Jesus go? And what are we going to do?

I think that the portions of John's Gospel, we've been reading, are about a community of Christians who asked just that.

Where did he go? Where is he now? He's somewhere else! And what about us here and now?

Actually, everybody asks this once and a while—not just Christians. “What would Jesus do?” gets thrown around a good deal. And that, too is really—where did he go?

You see, Jesus is not around. Not the way we see in the Gospel stories. So we are thrown back on our own questions and limited sight.

But it seems like that's the plan. There is something vital in our wrestling with living, while at the same time remembering Jesus. And then, seeking to find out how to follow here and now. There is something vital in that not being automatic.

Some years ago I took up sailing small boats after long time. When I rented one, turns out the one I was given had a line—a halyard—that needed to be attached with a knot, instead of a nice little brass fitting. I was kind of stuck

there on the pier. I just had to do it, but not so sure. At least I knew when it was not right- I got that much. So, if nobody was watching, I'd get the knot tied—eventually—and sail away. And so I did. I was thrown back on whatever inadequate grasp I had.

So we Christians are still wondering what to do. It seems like our Baptism has put us smack in the middle, between an inner Christian life of prayer—seeking to know Jesus deep within, and then an outer world around us, personal, vocational, societal, that seeks to know Jesus—active.

That is something of what Jesus words in the prayer we hear are about. “May they ( that’s you and me, by the way) May they be one as you God and I are one,” prays Jesus. “I am leaving the “world” and coming to you.” They are in the world, but not of the world- they are one with you, God, and me.”

In the world, not “of” the world.

This whole chapter of John’s Gospel we listen in on Jesus and God—Jesus prayer to God. About us.

The “world” even as it can hate what Jesus came to give, even when it hates what reminds us of Jesus, still—that world is also and at the same time seeking Jesus. Where’d he go? They also say.

In Luke’s Gospel, the story of the Ascension and the coming of the Spirit is one great memory to keep the church going on track. We were left, we were looking up to find Jesus, but there is work to do in the city—in the here and now. Next week we hear of speeches beyond our abilities when Peter starts speaking to the multi-lingual world. Pentecost is the birth of the Church. Notice, not the birth of individual Christianity either, but the freed up community in the all too real world of a vast empire then.

In John’s telling it’s the same question, the same anguish. And with this prayer we listen to, it’s not about just how a soul finds Jesus again, but also and at the same time about the disciples—now still in the world. The question, “Where did Jesus go?” keeps the disciples- the Church- from getting off easy. We have to answer that question—to ourselves in order to give an account to the wrestling world in which Jesus so deliberately keeps us.

What we get from this unusual peek into God and Jesus together fills out the picture.

Jesus together with God, (he calls God “Holy Father”) is called, “Oneness. “ We are invited into that intimate unity in love of two. That’s the astounding thing here: thrown back into the world so far from God, we are given only

this: Jesus prays that we be one with him and God. To listen in to this prayer is good news to us when we think we are just thrown back on ourselves. It is where we too will be while “in the world.” Inside Jesus prayer to the Father is the Spirit. It is the gift to us. The Spirit takes us nowhere but between Jesus and the Father, while we are still in this world. What is called here “the world” means the place of wrestling, of separation instead of oneness, of violence instead of life. To find—and this is vital—to find that Jesus has gone nowhere but where we find ourselves wrestling with the issues of our life, and our life with others in the world.

I recently was hoping to restart a conversation in a community which began a year ago during some Black lives matter events, and it provoked a lot hostility and division. A year later, it’s now just opposing camps, and a local election this fall. It’s so easy for us to just stop the conversation about American racism just there: it’s sensitive, it’s divisive. But isn’t it just there, when it gets pointed and real, that the conversation about racial equity can become fruitful?

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† “Holy and gracious Father, . . . you sent Jesus Christ, . . . to live and die as one of us.” Eucharistic Prayer A, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 362

“Eternal God, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with

To be “in the world” but not defined by the brokenness in world. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of Jesus and the Father’s intimacy. This is where, according to Jesus’ prayer he leaves us.

Christian calling is the call to prayer, holiness, peace and singleness of heart, without leaving the conflict of good and evil in the outer world in which we are deliberately placed.

In our liturgical texts this is summed up succinctly. Sometimes we use a Eucharistic Prayer which thanks God that he sent “Jesus Christ . . . to share our human nature, live and died as one of us.” And then, as we do today, after Communion, we pray; “Send us into the world in peace.”† Our whole Christian life is summed up by this. Linking God’s “sending” of Jesus and God’s sending of us are the words, “Living members of the Body of Christ.”

Let us listen deeply to the prayer we are given access to, let us be nourished by today’s communion which is summed up in Jesus loving words to God— about us. Amen.

*spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart;”* Prayer after Communion, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 365.