

Seventh Sunday of Easter - May 17, 2026

- Acts 1:6-14 - Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 - 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 - John 17:1-11

“There’s work to do”

1. There are transition times in our lives when it feels like all we can do is look around and ask: Now what?
 - a. Times of transition can be something we look forward to but at the same time we may come to dread them.
 - b. It can be a personal transition (graduating, getting married, a new job, retiring), or it can be a communal transition (recovering from a flood, seeing new people in the congregation).
 - c. Think of those transitions as thresholds, like leaving room and entering another one. That can be difficult.
 - d. Maybe it’s because I’m getting older, though I imagine I’m not the only one who, when entering a room in the house, I instantly forget why I went into that room!
 - e. Physical and symbolic thresholds can have a way of challenging us, even trying to make us forget where we’ve been and where we’re going.
2. The story of the ascension of Jesus which we just read is a symbolic threshold
 - a. We catch up with the narrative days after Jesus had been raised from the grave and his disciples all gather to get final instructions from him
 - b. This is a moment of transition: every thing would change after it.
 - c. Notice that right before the ascension of Jesus to heaven, the disciples asked a backward-looking question (even though it feels like a future question):
 - i. “so, when will things go back to the way they used to be?”
 - ii. That had been their big hope, dashed for some, that Jesus would get rid of the Romans, overturn the government and the religious establishment as he had overturned the tables in the temple,
 - iii. and then go back to the good old days, days of their own King, a united 12 tribes, the stuff we read about in the scriptures. I can’t say I blame them.
 - iv. But, what we may miss is that in fact they were wondering when THEY would also be in power.
 1. They had asked this type of question before
 2. Jesus tells them they can’t know when God would act next,
 3. and also promises them SPIRIT POWER to be HIS WITNESSES.
 4. Pentecost would soon come, and they’d be filled with the Spirit

- d. When Jesus does finally go into heaven, and the disciples are in shock and still looking up, two people draw near them and challenged them
 - i. Why are you here doing nothing? There is work to do! And Jesus will return in due time.
 - ii. So the men and women who followed Jesus went back to Jerusalem and got involved in prayer and building community, awaiting the arrival of the Holy Spirit which Jesus promised them.
- 3. Graduates you find yourselves at a threshold, going from one familiar place to an unfamiliar place.
 - a. Maybe finishing high school and going to college, or finishing college and going to the work force.
 - b. Or, as a friend recently told me that he had been promoted to retirement.
 - c. So, while I'm not giving your graduation speech, I do want to encourage you and all of us as we each face our own moments of transition
 - d. Taking the story of Jesus and his disciples, there are a few things to watch in this time of transition, of going from a well-known place to a new reality.
 - i. Remembering and honoring the past isn't the same as being trapped by it. Let the past experiences which have brought you to this moment build you up, not trap you.
 - ii. Your new reality will require adaptation.
 - 1. I couldn't have predicted the new skills and mindset I would need when I graduated from college or from seminary
 - 2. I didn't know how to prepare for the challenges and blessings I would eventually face.
 - 3. Jesus promised power and the Spirit, and so count on God to give you what you will need when you need it.
 - 4. Be faithful and attentive. It will come.
 - iii. Finally, time to get moving because there is work to do.
 - 1. It may be tempting to linger on campus after graduation.
 - 2. After all, you just figured out how things work in your four years there and now you have to leave, can I at least enjoy it a little?
 - 3. When Tracy and I got married, we got to live in married housing at the seminary. Sweet little apartment. Oh, and the rent was ridiculously low thanks to school subsidizing it.
 - 4. When I graduated that May I still didn't have a job.
 - 5. I was applying and trying, but still didn't have one.
 - 6. The seminary gently and wisely wrote me a letter: congratulations on graduating! We're proud of you.

7. By the way, rent for the apartment goes up to market rate in August. We're praying for you!
4. It's scary to go into the unknown, but you don't go alone (it only feels that way). You go with God's Spirit filling you with wisdom, and your community cheering for you, and your family ready to support you in ways you've not yet realized you needed. Be witnesses of what Jesus has taught you. That's true whether you're a pastor, a professor, a painter, a parent. Show through your life the way Jesus lived, with compassion, being with the people on the margins, standing up for what is God's justice.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ascension-of-our-lord/commentary-on-acts-11-11-11>

Reflection questions

1. Share advice you got from a loved one or mentor when you made a big transition in life (graduating, starting a new job, getting married).
2. If you had been standing with the other disciples as Jesus left you (Acts 1:6-14), what two things would be going through your mind?
3. Being a witness to Jesus certainly means we have a lot of work to do. With the help of the Spirit, where are you being a faithful witness, and where do you need more help?