

According to the on-line Lectionary resource for the Anglican Church in Canada, the feast of the Ascension is "the only Principal Feast that is no longer widely observed in parishes. Although many are reluctant to give up on the expectation that the Ascension Thursday services would be well observed on that traditional day of the week, most have now realised that the transfer of this day of observation to Sunday is inevitable." The Church is changing. We all know this.

The church is changing - but into what, we do not yet know. In the scriptures for today, we observe the earliest form of the church in a significant moment of change, also with unknown ramifications. Jesus departs from his disciples.

No longer will the disciples have Jesus with them as they make their way through the world. Now they have to figure things out for themselves. But they are not left without support. Jesus said he'd send the Spirit to them to guide them, and to help bring their attention back to the good news of the kingdom of heaven when things get particularly challenging - like they do.

We find ourselves at a significant moment of change in the church today. No longer can we gather in the church building as we once did, or use the building as the base camp for ministries. We have to do things differently now in order to stay faithful to the good news of Jesus Christ, and the gospels, and the kingdom of heaven, and still get all the things done that we do.

Like the disciples in the first reading from Acts today, we too may find ourselves looking heavenward for Jesus, our eyes gazing after the departure of all we've come to know and understand. I would argue that there are angels not far from us now - wondering once again what we're looking into the sky for.

After the ascension, the disciples no longer have Jesus to physically lead them, to tell them what to do or where to go, or what side of the boat to cast their nets today. He's already done that. Part of the job of discipleship is to learn the lessons of faith, and the ways of being the good news in our communities, so that when we set off on our own, we'll have the tools to continue that which Jesus taught.

The church is changing and it's up to us now to do the work of leading, based on what we've learned from the past. Gathering all we learned from Jesus, mustering all our life experiences and knowledge, it's our turn to refocus our vision, not on the clouds, but back down to ground level - because that's where our work lies.

We already have all the tools we need to make the kingdom of heaven more visible, and to help others perceive the good news of God that we know is very present with us. In many ways, we've got it a lot easier than those first disciples. We have two centuries of church history. Countless books have been written on any number of subjects relating to what we're supposed to do in the world while we await Jesus' return. There are more theologians that I can count; more liturgies than days in a year to pray them, more traditions have been forgotten than any one of us will ever know.

Honestly, we have more church candles than anyone can count. If we lit every candle in every church around the planet, we could set the world on fire - and not in a good way! But - if each of those candles represented one good way to love our neighbours, to feed the hungry, to care for the poor, to comfort the lonely, and in

every way to share the love of Jesus, our world would surely glow brighter than the sun. Do you know who's able to light all those candles? You. And me. And all of us together can do more than those first disciples ever thought possible.

A few Sundays' ago we read where Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." I know the disciples heard him say this, but I wonder if they understood. They must have believed - even if only a little, because look. Here we are today. Even if they did believe by just a tiny ounce - it was enough. Jesus also said, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to a mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Because Jesus went to be with the heavenly father, we are free to take what he taught us about loving one another, about building communities of faith, about supporting one another, and make it fit the time and place where we find ourselves. We can make this new thing work.

If the original disciples appeared today and took a look around, they wouldn't know what to make of the world! Horseless carriages!? Airplanes!? Zoom!? Good thing we're here, and come equipped with so much knowledge and experience that we can put to use. Thank goodness for everything that's happened in the world to get us to this point, so we know what we're capable of doing to make a positive difference. Thank goodness for YOU; and your life experience. The world needs you now more than ever. You come equipped with a lifetime of experience and the ability to flex as needed - to adapt and overcome adversity. As we, the community of Jesus' disciples of today, engage the complexities of the world, we will add to the accumulated knowledge of the generations that follow us. They will use the ideas and actions we develop when they are faced with the next big challenge.

The world is changing. The simple recognition that observing the feast of the Ascension on the customary day is no longer a given in the world as it now functions, is just one small indicator that other, bigger changes are taking place. Being aware of those changes puts us in a better place to respond to them effectively. There will always be universal needs in the world - poverty, injustice, loneliness, the need to be loved and to love. What those needs look like will not always stay the same. Discipleship is strongest when we can adapt our understanding of the world to recognize new expressions of need in our communities, and thus how best to respond to overcome.

As we take the very careful, tentative and slow first steps into a new world, let us gently remind one another to look carefully, with the eyes of our hearts, to see the world as Jesus sees it. The Spirit of Wisdom, this Holy Spirit that Jesus sent to guide us, will help us adapt when we need to. The Spirit will soften our hearts when they become hardened; and bring us the flame we need to light those candles in the darkness. Even if the church should somehow run out of candles, the light we'll need to see the way ahead will come from you.

Jesus may have ascended into heaven on some unspecified day, but not before giving his disciples everything they need to make the kingdom of heaven thrive in the world. Those guys did it way back then. We'll do it now.

And that's good news.