

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Sermon for April 27, 2008
Raymond Raney

Acts 1:6-14

Psalm 68:1-10,33-36

1 Peter 4:12-14;5:6-11

John 17:1-11

Do you remember, I think it was a scene from a W.C. Fields movie. A crowded street and one man stands on the sidewalk and look up at the sky, and just stand there. Sooner or later, someone would join him and look up, then a third, and a fourth, until you have this crowd of people looking up in the air. Then they'd start asking: "what are we looking at?" The question would mill around the group until someone remembered the one man, and they'd ask him: "What are you looking at?" The he'd shrug his shoulders: "I'm not looking at anything. I've got a stiff neck."

I'm reminded of that scene, or the take off of it that was on Candid Camera, every time I read this passage from Acts. Here we have the disciples standing around looking at the sky. They can't see Jesus any longer, but they keep staring at the sky.

Then these two guys in white robes show up. "Pardon up, but what are you looking at?" The disciples don't answer, but I can hear them grunting, "dunno." So the two guys in the white robes tell them, "he'll be back the same way he left" and it is implied, "but standing here staring into the sky won't help. You need to get to work. You're supposed to be doing what he told you to do."

Jesus was preparing his followers for his departure in the Gospel reading today. He is concluding the farewell discourses by asking God's protection for those who have followed him to the end. "They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." ... Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

As we end this Easter season I read Jesus' prayer as a prayer for us all. To me he is not just praying for the disciples but for the church as a whole. More's the pity that we are not one as he and the Father are one. We pray for Christian unity, but it is not easy because we build walls that separate us one from another.

I think Christians today would do well to heed Peter's admonition: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time."

It's just not that easy, is it? So much divides us, and that's the source of much of our anxiety today. Who's getting it right? Who's doing what needs to be done? What do I need to be doing? Am I doing enough?

The past week I got to know a family here in Edgewood so I could do a memorial service. It was a gift to them that their church could not provide. But I was given a gift as well. The woman we remembered and gave thanksgivings for her life had a favorite poem. Let me read it to you.

How do you live your dash?

By Linda Ellis

I read of a man who stood to speak
At the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on her tombstone
From the beginning...to the end.

He noted that first came her date of birth
And spoke the following date with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all
Was the dash between those years. (1962-2008)

For that dash represents all the time
That she spent alive on earth...
And now only those who loved her
Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own;
The cars...the house...the cash,
What matters is how we live and love
And how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard...
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left,
That can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough
To consider what's true and real,
And always try to understand
The way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger,
And show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives
Like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect,
And more often wear a smile...
Remembering that this special dash

Might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy's being read
With your life's actions to rehash...
Would you be proud of the things they say
About how you spent your dash?

We are all called to help. We just need to decide what it is we are called to do. Figuring that out sometimes makes us worry, and Peter gives us an answer there, too. "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

As it says in the Scriptures: "Take my yoke upon you." That doesn't mean bearing a cross alone. The yoke of Jesus is a double yoke that means the burden we carry is shared by another. "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

We are called to bring action into our lives. That's the funny part about the disciples, standing there, watching Jesus ascend into the heavens. They were so awestruck by the flight, that they forgot to do what they were told: get to work.

And that's what we often forget. We're not supposed to stand around looking up into the clouds watching for the return of Christ, we're supposed to get busy so that when Judgment Day comes, the guys in the white robes will have to tap us on the shoulder and say, "the man wants to talk with you."