



Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2026

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

Rev. David Owren

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

John 17:1-11

Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I want to share a story. It was a flight from Seattle to San Francisco. The plane made a stop in Sacramento and many of the passengers got off to stretch their legs. Everybody got off the plane except one gentleman who was blind. His Seeing Eye dog lay quietly underneath the seats in front of him. The man was obviously a regular on the flight because the pilot addressed him by name.

“Keith”, the pilot said, “we’re in Sacramento for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?”

“No thanks,” Keith replied, “but maybe the dog would like to stretch his legs.”

So now picture this. The pilot was wearing sunglasses. He came off the airplane, walked through the boarding lounge, led by a seeing-eye dog.¹

People in the terminal looked in amazement. Was this a prank or had technology come this far? What they thought they saw was a blind pilot coming off a commercial jet that just had landed. But in actuality they saw a pilot walking a seeing-eye dog for a friend. Things are not always what they seem.

Last Thursday was the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord. Forty days after His resurrection Jesus ascended into heaven. Jesus had completed His ministry—being born of a woman, living as a human being, sacrificing His life for all people, resurrected to new life, appearing and disappearing to his followers, and then taken up by a cloud to heaven. It appeared that Jesus was gone.

Sometimes at first glance we get things wrong too. Barbara Brown Taylor, Episcopal priest and author calls the Ascension “the Feast of the Left-Behind.” Jesus left His disciples and the entire world when He ascended to heaven almost two thousand years ago. Jesus is gone. Or is he?

Maybe Jesus ascending into heaven is not what it seems. Sure, He ascended into heaven, but He also promised to be with His followers always. Maybe He is present everywhere in a new way—where love of God and neighbor is a way of life. We feed on Him in the Holy sacrament of communion, the feast of thanksgiving, so we become the body of Christ here on earth. Christ lives in us! We have a job to do—to be the body of Christ to everyone! The Ascension is not what it seems. It’s not just about Jesus sitting on a throne in heaven, it’s about

¹ Bottom of the Barrel

proclaiming the Good News of God's Kingdom here on earth. You and I are the messengers, the inviters, who share God's message of love and forgiveness.

Jesus never said, "Worship me." But He did say, "Follow me." Easier said, than done. We are called to die to our false self-aggrandizement, to let go of who we think we are and think about who we need to be.

How often do we turn Christianity into an evacuation plan for the next world?² Heaven can wait while we deal with the woes of this world.

Or sometimes we suffer from separation anxiety. Jesus promised always to be with us, but where is He when we really need Him?

Or occasionally we just want a fixer for all of life's problems. Come on Jesus, be a pal, would ya.

And then there are all sorts of cultural pressures...

Today many people spend more time and money trying to look good instead of just being good and giving money away,

Today "who I am" seems more important than "who we are."

Today what we see with our eyes gets more clicks, than what we see with our hearts.

And, by the way, why are there 4 emojis for the devil and not one for God?

Jesus is a hard act to follow, but there is hope. When I taught at College of the Redwoods in California, one of my students served on the Youth Board of the Jane Goodall Foundation. Jane Goodall called herself a "messenger of hope." She showed that hope could be learned, practiced, and passed on — one child, one chimpanzee, one forest at a time. She said, "you cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you ...what you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

You can make a difference by doing God's thing in your own way. Hear the Gospel and be changed by the good news of God's all-inclusive love. Don't be content to stare at a footprint on the Mt of Olives, feel the imprint of Jesus on your life of worship and service. Be what you believe and confess--a new creation, a proclaimer of the Kingdom of God, an instrument of God's grace. In an age if identity the only identity that really matters is being a Christ person...a person for all seasons for all people for all time.

What that means is this:

Listen without judgement.

Give without expectation.

Act without malice.

Talk without manipulation.

² **Integration & Guidance** by Richard Rohr.

Why Are You Looking Up? Reflections on Luke 24:44-53, May 23, 2014 by Blair R. Monie, Patheos.

Care without self-concern.
Be content without admiration.
Compromise without grievance.
Be present without an agenda.
Love without expecting love back.
Sacrifice without grumbling.
Be silent without distraction.
Be good when nobody's looking.
Be satisfied without complaining.
Be faithful without knowing everything.
Be hopeful regardless of circumstance.
See Christ in every person.

The message today and always is Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and prepared a place for us in His kingdom—the kingdom of NOW!

We have been chosen and baptized with the Holy Spirit. We have received power to be witnesses of God's redeeming love to the ends of the earth. We are called to be joyful because God has fulfilled the promise salvation. God, in Christ, is with us every step of the way. We are given a holy nudge to slow down and appreciate the fact that God is in control of the past, present and future.

Bishop Ken Untener wrote a piece entitled "A Future Not Our Own." It goes like this:

A Future Not Our Own

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of
saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession
brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives include everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.³

We are called Christians, Jesus people, saints of God Almighty, in a long line of saints stretching back to Adam and Eve. We are never isolated but are always part of the larger whole. We don't escape reality, we embrace it, warts and all, in good times and bad, in life and in death, in uncertain times and dark emotions, in pain and loss, estrangement, sickness, alienation, political divides, cultural shifts, as we welcome new life and grieve the passing of all life.

Last week I went to the hardware store to pick up some salt pellets for our water softener. I wanted six bags so the clerk called for someone to assist me. A young man loaded the barge with my salt and we headed for my truck. As we walked I thanked him for helping me and mentioned that my arthritis and tendinitis flare up when I lift heavy loads. "Oh," he said, "I'm so sorry. What's your name?"

"David," I replied.

"I will pray for you," he said.

I thanked him and asked, "What's your name?"

"R.J." he replied.

³ Ibid.

So now R.J. is praying for me and I am praying for R.J. That's what the Kingdom of God looks like as the ascended Jesus loves us and enters our hearts and lives. Jesus may sit at the right hand of God the Father, but now everybody gets to see Jesus in you, here on earth.

Oh, by the way, the next time you are sitting in the airport waiting for your departure and you see a pilot with sunglasses being led by a seeing-eye dog boarding your flight, know that a man named Keith is probably on board too and all will be well. Be of good faith. You will ascend safely to new heights of Christian witness and service as you await the coming of the Lord again. Amen.