

## Stillness and Movement

Mother Teresa's faith inspired her to choose a life of poverty and service, encountering God in and alongside neighbors who were the poorest of the poor in Kolkata, India. This Confirmation Sunday is a special day that graces us once every few years in the life of our congregation. Today, the Holy Spirit encourages Zoey and all of us to open ourselves to the possibility that our ever-evolving faith in a loving God can have significant impact on our overall way of life.

Among many wise thoughts from Mother Teresa, here is the one that has had the greatest impact on me: *"I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things."*

With eyes open or closed, I invite you to join your hearts with mine in prayer. Holy Loving Spirit, we are so grateful for the freedom to be gathered today for worship – on our live stream and on this land loved by First Nations and others across time and where we are now weaving our way of community. Help us in this hour to say yes to your invitation to be changed by faith – that is, life lived in continuous prayer, attentive to your presence within each stillness and movement. We pray this in the name of our friend and teacher, Jesus. Amen.

Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles is often referred to as the story of Jesus's post-resurrection ascent into heaven. In accordance with timing details noted in scripture, Ascension Day always lands forty days after Easter (with Easter Sunday counting as day one). Ascension Day occurs ten days before Pentecost, which we will celebrate next Sunday.

In this brief moment for reflection on a joyful morning, let's notice a few encouraging lessons we might glean from the story of Jesus' ascension and from the pastoral ponderings of John O'Donohue.

**Lesson one: Trust requires patience and not knowing.** We heard: *“Jesus told them not to leave Jerusalem. ‘Wait, rather, for what God has promised, of which you have heard me speak,’ Jesus said... ‘It’s not for you to know times or dates that Abba God has decided. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you’...”*

Oof! *“Wait... it’s not for you to know when...”* Yet, *“you will receive power...”* Often, when we long for change (be it relief from pain for a loved one or ourself, securing a new job, brokerage of peace amid conflict, a turning over of the tables of injustice), we want the love of God to act right now. Sometimes, when we surrender to not knowing and develop our trust muscle by practicing patience, we notice the wisdom in God’s timing and movement – both of which might be unpredictable to us.

**Lesson two: Be teachable and listen for God’s clarifying summons.** We heard: *“They were still gazing up into the heavens when two messengers dressed in white stood beside them. ‘You Galileans – why are you standing here looking up at the skies?... Jesus, who has been taken from you – this same Jesus will return, in the same way you watched him go into heaven.’”*

Sometimes, we get stuck in what seemed like the right move when we began. The disciples had wisely paused in holy stillness as they watched their beloved rabbi slip away from their view. They allowed themselves the stillness that many moments on a complex journey of grief require. Yes, and. Yes, they held stillness - and they did not close themselves off from companionship – with each other and with those strangers. They heard God’s summons (God’s gentle urging): there is more life, more relationships, more work calling your name. You’ve got this. Trust in me in you.

**Lesson three: Go deeper. Life is an endless cycle of reflection and action.**

We heard: *“The apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives... With one mind, they devoted themselves to constant prayer.”*

Aware that they needed to practice patience and be available to the Spirit’s movement, open to continuing to listen for God’s summons (God’s gentle, persistent urging), they devoted themselves to prayer – that is, a life of heightened awareness to God’s presence in reflection and action - stillness and movement. The earliest disciples of Jesus and many of our most effective spiritual leaders have embodied what Mother Teresa recognized about the life of faith as a cycle of reflection and action when she said, *“I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things.”*

Here are a few of the lessons that I find most compelling in John O’Donohue’s thoughts about our inner life.

**Lesson one: We are faithful to God’s presence within us when we wait and watch for emergence.** We heard, *“Somewhere in every heart there is a **discerning** voice... It advises distance and opens up a new perspective through which the concealed meaning of a situation might **emerge**...”*

I wonder: Have you ever experienced a new insight, a sense of clarity that could only have appeared by unfolding and emerging over time? May we each lean in toward the discerning voice within, listening with generous patience to a voice that is unique to each of us, yet breathed into life by the same Holy Spirit.

**Lesson two from John O’Donohue: Our quietest inner discernment can have enormous impact on the course of our life.**

We heard, “*This voice is an **inner whisper** not obvious or known to others outside... It receives little attention and is not usually highlighted among a person's qualities. Yet **so much depends on that small voice...**”*

I wonder: Have you recently had one of those moments when a decision fully lands within you? Perhaps parts of you tugged at the inner whisper – wanting to continue to weigh the options. But your soul’s small and mighty voice knew what was right and true for you. It knew how to lead you into your next right step.

**And lesson three: Trust that God who is love beyond our imagining is a catalyst that launches possibilities.** We heard, “*...that small voice **whispers from somewhere beyond** and encourages the heart to hold out for dignity, respect, beauty and love.*”

I wonder: In which of God’s best possibilities just enumerated for our human community (dignity, respect, beauty, love) – in which of those is your small inner voice whispering you into action?

May a prayerful life of reflection and action guide each of us into changing things. Love is counting on us. Amen.

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St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)  
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Acts 1:1-14, an excerpt from *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*