

Acts 1:1-14
Luke 24:44-53

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the wind and cleanse.
Come as the fire and burn.

Convict, convert and consecrate our lives to humanity's
great good and your great glory; through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.

It is a typical school day morning routine. My husband is
getting our middle child, Sofia - then almost 6 years old -
into his car to take her to La Jolla Elementary School. I am
wrestling our then almost four year old, Julian, into my car.
He is upset because I'd forgotten - when we passed
through the garage - to grab him a bag of goldfish to eat
on the way to school.

Dominic - who is 15 years old - is late as usual. We crash
into each other in the garage as I run back inside to get
something else I forgot. Dominic - shirtless, belt-less and
shoe-less - carrying his enormous backpack full of books
and his second bag with all of his stuff for water polo
practice - asks me frantically if I've seen his Bishop's
sweatshirt, and he begins to dig through all of the clean
laundry bins next to the washer and dryer.

It's 7:50 am, and Dominic and I both have to be at school
at 8:10 for morning advisory. We're going to be late. I plug
my phone into the car and ask Siri to play some children's
songs on iTunes. The first song is one of our favorites -
"Hello World!" by Red Grammar.

*Hello world! My old friend!
It's another day. I'm glad to see you again.
The sun is up! I'm ready to play.
Hello world! So what do you say?*

With a playful and happy voice, Red Grammer goes on to
list all of the fun things that await the day: "There are
bikes to ride, frogs to find, forts to build, trees to climb,
dolls to dress, beads to string, teams to choose, and songs
to sing" . . . Julian and I are smiling and happy, singing
along, and Dominic by this point has put his AirPods in so
he can listen to Foo Fighters. The next song is also by Red
Grammar - The ABCs of You.

*If I wrote down all of my feelings for you
I'd probably fill up an ocean or two
So in the end I decided to
List the ABCs of you
I think you're ...
A-1, grade A,
beloved and beautiful,*

*capable, caring,
delightful, dependable . . .*

It goes on all the way to Z, ending with "You're one in a
zillion!"

We're on track for an awesome day ... until we get to the
third song. It's one I've never heard before by a country
singer I've never heard of. It's called "Don't Laugh at Me."
I'm not sure why it's on the playlist of children's songs but
I figure Siri and iTunes know what they're doing so we
continue listening. I later learn that the song is from a
children's picture book called "Don't Laugh at Me" by
Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin. It starts like this...

*I'm a little boy with glasses
The one they call the geek
A little girl who never smiles
'Cause I've got braces on my teeth
And I know how it feels
To cry myself to sleep*

*I'm that kid on every playground
Who's always chosen last
A single teenage mother
Tryin' to overcome my past
You don't have to be my friend
Is it too much to ask?*

*Don't laugh at me, don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain
'Cause in God's eyes we're all the same
Someday we'll all have perfect wings
Don't laugh at me*

Well by now I'm tearing up, and I look in the rear view
mirror and Julian is too. The song continues . . .

*I'm the cripple on the corner
You pass me on the street
And I wouldn't be out here beggin'
If I had enough to eat
And don't think I don't notice
That our eyes never meet*

*I lost my wife and little boy
When someone crossed that yellow line
The day we laid 'em in the ground
Is the day I lost my mind
Right now I'm down to holdin'
This little cardboard sign*

*So don't laugh at me, don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain*

*'Cause in God's eyes we're all the same
Someday we'll all have perfect wings*

It is 8:00 by the time we drive up to Julian's daycare. I text my co-advisor to let her know I won't be there for morning advisory. I get Julian out of the car, and we take a moment to hug on the sidewalk. As I wipe his tears from his cheeks, we talk about why the song made him sad.

I tell him something about how there are a lot of people in the world who are hurting, and God comforts them through our kindness. I remind him of that saying that it's always important to be kind because we never know what someone else is going through.

Later that night, as we are lying in bed - reviewing the day and saying our prayers - we talk about what it feels like to be left out, or made fun of, and what it means to be homeless.

Educator and writer Parker Palmer says that "we each arrive in this world with gifts and as a gift" (Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation). I tell Julian that I think his gifts are love and compassion.

And, at the mention of his gifts, he sits up in bed and his eyes light up with hope. I can tell that - instead of feeling overwhelmed by the world's hurt - he feels empowered and encouraged that he can do something about it.

Now, when he says his prayers, he usually begins with "Dear God, I love my life," and he inevitably works in, "Thank you for my gifts of love and compassion."

If you're a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, big sister or brother, or caretaker of young children, you've probably found yourself at some point in your life having to explain difficult things: poverty, hunger, and homelessness; war; racism; slavery; why so many Jews were killed in the Holocaust and why so many Native Americans live on reservations.

Children ask the most innocent questions, and they have the purest and most wide open hearts.

So fresh from the other side - from the shelter of the Divine Presence - they are most intimately and innocently connected to God, and moved by God's dream and vision for the world. It is as if their dream and God's dream are one and the same. Their vision has not yet been clouded or dimmed like ours after years of living on this earth. Children expect the Kingdom of God. They believe in it. They hope for it. They remember what God's dream looks like. They know what we must do to usher it into being,

and they won't accept as normal or right realities that are so contrary to it.

Desmond Tutu, in his book, *God Has A Dream*, says children "see with the eyes of their heart." Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he said: "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mark 10:15).

Ascension Day was this past Thursday - May 18th. It's the day when Jesus - after fulfilling his mission and purpose on earth - is finally exalted in victory and returns to the right hand of God.

According to the scriptures, Jesus's ascension into heaven occurred exactly 40 days after Jesus's resurrection. Hence, it falls every year in our liturgical calendar on a Thursday. It's one of the great festivals of the church but when it's celebrated on a Thursday - when everyone is in school and working - it can pass by without much notice so I'm glad we've moved it to this morning.

Now Jesus' ascension, if you think about it, is an odd wonder to contemplate. We've all seen the paintings and icons of Jesus - enveloped by rays of light - rising up from the earth, floating on the clouds as his bare feet dangle in mid air.

I still can't imagine the scene in any realistic or believable way but I've lived long enough to know that God works miracles in our lives and, just because our human minds struggle to make sense of such things, it doesn't mean they didn't happen.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples. He's just revealed himself to them, showing them the wounds in his hands and feet, eating in their presence, and opening "their minds to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

And then he commissions them - as his "witnesses" - to take the Gospel out into all the world: from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth; and he promises that they will be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

His final act - before he is carried up into heaven - is to bless them (Luke 24:50).

It's been over 2,000 years since Jesus walked this earth, and his message and teachings continue to live on today because of the witness of those first disciples.

We're still waiting - in a sort of limbo - for Jesus to return - and ultimately for the completion or fulfillment of the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven."

And, one thing remains clear: As we wait for Jesus to return, there is a lot of work to do.

As a church, we believe that the power from on high that clothed the disciples is the same power that God has given us, and just as that power compelled Jesus's disciples out into the world that power will also compel us into the world.

Because - as Jesus scholar Marcus Borg reminds us - the Good News of God's love was never meant to be restricted to private rooms, the Temple, churches or other houses of worship.

The Good News of God's coming Kingdom was never meant for only a select few - but for all of God's children - especially the outcast, the poor, the despised and the most vulnerable.

Commissioned, called, clothed and blessed, Jesus sends us forth into all of the private and public places where people live and love, and work and watch and weep:

- where friends accompany friends through miscarriages, divorces, diagnoses, deaths and other losses;
- where doctors work 24 hour ER shifts, and nurses tenderly and heroically care for infants in the NICU, and chaplains console grieving family members in the ICU;
- where spouses hold the hands of their beloved as they prepare for surgery, or slip from this life to the next;
- where mothers and fathers do their best to keep calm, and to model integrity and compassion;
- where our elders sit alone - day after day - shut away in nursing homes;
- where our houseless neighbors sleep in tents under freeway ramps;
- and where those who are deemed beyond redemption serve sentences for crimes they wish they could take back . . .

It is in all of the places where sorrow, doubt, despair and grief speak louder than hope that the Gospel must be proclaimed.

But, before we go forth, we must first do something else. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" where they - along with Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers - devoted themselves to prayer and were "continually in the temple blessing God" (Luke 24:53).

They didn't book their tickets, pack their bags, and start raising money for their mission trip. They didn't come up with a Jesus campaign slogan with four spiritual laws. They didn't do any of that. The scriptures tell us they stayed together, they waited, and they prayed. They sought God, and they listened.

Jesus also prayed. He spent countless hours not healing, not preaching, not teaching, not making the world a better place, but talking to God. It was only after he prayed that he went about doing the work of God.

Why, we might ask, is prayer so crucial to the success of the Jesus movement? Because without prayer, all we are broken and empty vessels who do more harm than good; without prayer - without a constant and enduring connection to the one whose message we seek to share - we are likely to get the message wrong.

To be a witness for God, we need to know God, and to know God we must be in constant and intimate communication with God.

God knows our world needs activists - disciples who will not rest until our broken world is repaired - little Juliens who know what their gifts are and who feel empowered to use them.

Like the children in our midst, we need to "see with the eyes of our hearts" and then we can get busy and proclaim and create the world that God dreams of.

But first, let us pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.

Come as the wind and cleanse.

Come as the fire and burn.

Convict, convert and consecrate our lives to humanity's great good and your great glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.