



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
May 14 2023 - Sixth Sunday of Easter - Rogation Sunday
Canon Paul Walker

This Thursday we will turn the page in the Christian calendar. We will mark an essential but underrated event in the life of Christ that is fully noted in the creeds. It is largely unacknowledged as an event to exploit in the retail industry and secular world. It is rather unnoticed perhaps because it is an event that, unlike Jesus' birth or death, we can't really connect with it from our own experience, and it seems a bit mysterious or even ambiguous. This Thursday will be forty days after Easter - the Feast of the Ascension.

The disciples gathered in Galilee, and as they looked up they watched with wide eyes and gaping mouths as the unimaginable happened: Jesus disappeared from their sight, ascending back into heaven, back from where he came, to be reunited with his Father and to sit on his throne as the King of Kings.

They would be left speechless as once again they would feel abandoned, left alone.

The few days preceding the Feast of Ascension are known as Rogation-tide. The term Rogation comes from the Latin, *rogatio*, "to ask." Traditionally it

would be a time to process around the boundaries of the parish, through the fields and farms, chanting psalms and the Litany, to ask God's blessing on the plantings in the fields, to ensure that the earth will be fertile, the crops secure, and the harvest plentiful. "Do not abandon us, O Lord," would be the cry.

The event Jesus' ascension gets a lot of ink in the creed:

"He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

The only one who has the power to judge with equity and in love is the one who was crucified and raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. That is a *unique* role that no one else can fulfill.

In the face of that judgement, and the time of spring planting, the cry remains: "Do not abandon us, O Lord."

It all comes back to address a very basic fear. It is the fear of every child; every adult; every human being. There is that moment of disorientation which quickly accelerates to panic when you feel like you've lost your parent, spouse, or loved one at the airport, at the sports event, or in the grocery store. One minute you were looking at the chocolate bars, and when you next look up you look

around the crowd and realize that you don't recognize anyone. *Where are they?* Your heart starts racing and you fear you've lost them.

It is the universal fear of being abandoned. "I will not leave you orphaned," Jesus says.

These are the words we hear on the sixth Sunday of Easter, before great but unnoticed feast of the Ascension, when we also today commemorate Florence Nightingale. The one who cared for wounded and abandoned soldiers in the medical tents in Crimea, and came home only to become an invalid herself, perhaps suffering from chronic fatigue or post traumatic stress. Whatever it was she suffered from for the rest of her life, she was significantly compromised in doing what she used to do but still brought immense social change to the status of women and elevated the role of nurses.

These are the words we hear on the day we acknowledge the women who carried us in their wombs and delivered us into the world and took on the role of becoming our mothers to hopefully ensure that we were secure and safe and able to grow into independent adults.

These are the words we hear before the Feast of the Ascension when the disciples looked up to see Jesus

leaving them. We hear Jesus say, "I will not leave you orphaned." You will not be abandoned. "Because I live, you will also live."

The entire arc of scripture, which the liturgies and creeds of the church are intended to articulate, reinforce, and support, addresses this universal fear with words of comfort. We hear it in the communion liturgy, "draw near with faith, and take this sacrament to your comfort." We hear it in the responses in Morning Prayer: "Mercifully hear us when we call upon thee. Make thy chosen people joyful. Bless thine inheritance. Mightily defend us. And take not thy Holy Spirit from us."

We hear it in the name given to Jesus when he was born: "You are to name him Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'." And we hear it in Jesus' last words before he ascended, "Remember, I am with you always to the end of the world."

It is written *so large* for us that we are intended to trip over it at every turn of life. I will not abandon you to the grave or condemn you to hell. Jesus has already been there and overcome it. So as the season of Easter comes to a close, the promise, the covenant of God, is to never leave us orphaned, and to always be with us.