We’re just about in the middle of a ten-day period formerly called Ascensiontide, the week and a half between Ascension Day (last Thursday) and Pentecost. While I love that old Anglican nomenclature (and I do), I fully support our return to the use of even more ancient terms. They remind us that Easter is a season, not merely one day, that stretches across what are called the Great Fifty Days from Easter Sunday through Pentecost, next Sunday.

Maybe we’re even more aware than usual of the Great Fifty Days this time around, because we’ve been largely confined to our homes this whole time (and more), away from our beloved church building.

Still, within the 50-day Easter season there is this major occurrence that marks a forty-day period. As you know, during these forty days after his resurrection our Lord appeared to his apostles and many others, teaching his disciples and many others. Then he ascended to heaven in their sight.

The forty days are a kind of mirror image of the forty days he was tempted in the desert before beginning his three-year ministry. We find the same in our church calendar: forty days of Lent, then forty days from the resurrection to the ascension.

The apostles were probably cognizant of the forty day frame around our Lord’s adult ministry.

Why wouldn’t they stand gazing into the heavens—looking up into the sky? What else would they do? What next? they must have been thinking.

And not for the first time. Now what? They might have felt a bit disoriented by the preceding forty days, certainly by the previous three years. They were living in confusing times.

Sound familiar? They tried to ground themselves (as we do) by posing religious, social, and political questions: “So, is now the time for the Kingdom of Israel to be restored, throwing off the weight of this Roman occupation?”

Give us something to make sense of this, they seem to be saying to Jesus. But he turns the question aside, implying that that was not what was most important at that point.

The disciples might have been looking for what we call a Hollywood ending, something to tie things up neatly. Maybe that’s what they were looking for up in the sky.

Neither Jesus nor either of the two angelic figures (the men in white) was going to provide such a satisfying ending for them. The angels or messengers were not much help: “You’re barking up the wrong tree,” they say, “You’re looking in the wrong direction.”

Like those earliest disciples, we get distracted and look in the wrong places for news of God’s plans for us. There was something different in store for them than whatever they imagined, just as there undoubtedly is for us, too.

Those two vested in white have instructions for the gathered group. It’s pretty straightforward: “Wait.” They really were reminding the group of Jesus’ own instructions before his physical departure from the world: “Wait here.”

And that’s just what they’re doing at the end of this opening passage from the Acts of the Apostles. They didn’t know that they weren’t so much at the end of something as at the beginning of something they could never have foreseen. They didn’t know their feet were planted on page one of the book about them and their deeds, their acts.

A bit like us at this moment. We’re thinking, “When is this going to be over?” They might have been thinking, “Well, that’s that,” just as they obviously were just after the crucifixion. Then their main concern was how to hunker down, hide out, and then sneak out of town without being detected, after a period of mourning. And then return to their lives as they were before all this began, before that terrifying week leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion.

But it wasn’t to be a return to life as usual. Not for them. Not for us. We don’t know what life is going to look like after the final “all clear,” if there is to be such a thing. Maybe after a vaccine is discovered and administered to everyone. But even then: life as if none of this had happened? Unlikely.

Here’s another thing we have in common with that band of eleven plus—the certain women, Jesus’ mother and brothers. Here’s a common thread. After all was said and done—after the great event of Pentecost—the world and many of the people in it did what they always do, settle into life as usual. Or try to.

Our world will have a similar pull toward an imagined normalcy (sometimes called the good old days), but we need to consider, and this week until Pentecost is an excellent time for such reflection, what this means for us who are called, as those first disciples were, to mighty acts of love in a world committed to business as usual.

Then and now the outer signs of business as usual are in place. But focusing on that might be to overlook what God has in store for us, a world infused with divine love in which we are flawed agents of that love. Such a world is being made new over and over again, sometimes in the wake of cataclysmic events such as then and now, sometimes in the day-to-day life in God’s creation.

The apostles’ story unfolded in book bearing their name, in a world forever changed by their faithfully following the Holy Spirit into unknown territory. And we collaborate with them and God to write this present chapter of the book, to continue that journey into the future God intends for us and those who follow.

Words from Shakespeare’s *Tempest* (not Huxley’s book) came to me at this moment: “Oh, wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, That has such people in’t!”

They and we are such people, guided by God’s grace.

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