

In the name of God, Father, Son, Spirit – One.

When someone asks you where heaven is, where do you point? Or where God is? I do it. I point upward, as though God is hovering just beyond this ceiling. Partly that's language confusion – in earlier times, people referred to the sky as "the heavens" – "the splendor of the heavens" "Heavens" simply meant "what we now think of as the atmosphere. And since "heaven" is also our term for where God dwells, "Our Father who art in heaven," a natural confusion ensues. God is "up there," we are "down here." In Jesus' incarnation, God was "down here" for a period of 33 years, after which he was executed and buried, rose from the dead, hung around for another 40 days in a spiritual body that was like but not quite the same as his human body – and, in the story we heard today, he goes back "up there" to take up his position at the throne of God. No wonder we address our prayers "to heaven."

Yet, where did Jesus say the life of God was to be found? Right here. "The Kingdom of heaven has come near you," he said. "Is in you." "Is among you." Jesus said the Kingdom was on earth, among those who believe in him. What do those two "men in white" who appear once Jesus disappears say? "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?" Maybe they're the same two were seen at his empty tomb telling his followers, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here – he is risen!" Jesus' followers already had the gifts and the training they needed – once they had received the gift of the Spirit, they were ready to be deployed. Just like us. The life of God is right here, right now, not "up there." We can put our focus on where we meet God in the here and now.

In our Night Prayers each weekday evening, I ask people to talk about where they experienced joy that day, where they felt hurt, where they sensed God. Those questions train us to be attentive to our spiritual selves all day long. They invite us to become more aware of where we've interacted with God. And when we're aware of that, our faith grows, and our ability to speak about our spiritual selves expands, and we more naturally tell our God stories. Our God stories, my friends, are the good news. And people are hungry for it!

Helen Carpenter has started a Facebook group, the La Plata Community Group. I saw a post there a few weeks ago about this local couple whose recent proposal outside WaWa copied the proposal-in-the-rain scene from the show *The Office*. They ended up being featured on John Kraskinski's web show, "Some Good News," and he surprised them by marrying them (got a quickie internet license), with their parents and best friends on Zoom, Jenna Fischer as matron of honor, and ultimately the whole cast of *The Office* showing up from their homes to dance. This is a great episode – and it introduced me to the show, which is fabulous. John Kraskinski has put this together for this Covid-19 period, and he gets videos of good things happening from all over, and brings on some hefty star power – Steven Spielberg, John Stewart, Oprah from a recent graduation episode, to name a few. Each episode has something that'll make you laugh and choke you up.

Well, he's stealing our jam, my friends. We are in the Good News business! The way this little internet thing he did to bring hope during a dark time has spread reminds us how contagious good news can be. Take a look: ([clip](#))

To share the good news about how God's love has impacted our lives, we need to be aware of our stories of where God is showing up around us. It can be very easy to focus just on what we want God to do next, not look at where God already is. Even Jesus' followers did that. Even after the resurrection and all they've seen and witnessed, they still want to know when God is going to kick the Romans back to Rome.

So when they had come together, they asked him,

"Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Here he is, risen from the dead, and they still want to know, "Now?"

Jesus answers, "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses – here where you live, in this region – and to the ends of the earth.*"

Notice, he doesn't actually answer their question – he responds by saying:

"I am going to give you power to be my witnesses in a way that will enable you to transform the world, not just overthrow this one empire. All empires and dominions will be under my authority. I will give you world-transforming power.

Not on your own strength – with the power you will receive from on high."

If we are going to be world-transformers; it is by the power of the Spirit.

If we're going to be witnesses, it is by the power of the Spirit.

So we can stop looking into heaven, and started looking for God all around us.

We can go beyond asking God to fix the things we want fixed, and open ourselves to what God is doing around us, where God is showing up.

We can start joining the Spirit wherever we sense the Spirit working, bringing to vivid life the Mission of God to restore and reconcile all things. And how do we do that, you ask? By being active in blessing.

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Blessed, blessing, blessing – that word keeps showing up.

God's blessing is always here; God is in the business of blessing. We are to live expecting blessing – not always exactly what we asked for, but all around us, every day, there is blessing. God's blessing is no passive wave of the hands. It is an active transfer of love and commendation.

To bless and be blessed is to increase the Life of God in us and around us.

Blessing is one way we communicate with God, and pass along to others what

God has given us. We might even say it is to be the chief activity of God's family.

We can bless people in person. We can bless people on Zoom or FaceTime.

We can bless on Facebook when we read something that hurts us.

We can call blessing down on people, on animals, on countries, on marriages, on houses and workplaces – you name it. When you say, “God bless you,” know that you are invoking the power that made the universe and inviting it to bring blessing to whomever or whatever you bless. Let's practice it now:

At Pentecost the disciples were so empowered after that event that nothing could shut them up – and their words were accompanied by signs and miracles and power to turn people's hearts toward God, to break down walls.

And because of the power God gave them, and the way they acted on it, we're here now – the message has been handed all the way down to us.

Now it's our turn, God has given us the power already –world-transforming power.

We will celebrate its coming next Sunday on Pentecost, but we've already got it.

We just need to activate the gift, and keep our eyes focused on what's around us – so we can be Christ's witnesses in Charles County, in Maryland, in the U.S. – and to the ends of the earth.

Time to join the “Some Good News” movement... which, by the way, Jesus started.
Amen.

Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, **after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.** After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and **speaking about the kingdom of God.** While staying with them, **he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father.** [*don't leave a place that has become highly dangerous for you... wait for the promise. What is the promise?*] "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when **you** will restore the kingdom to Israel?" [*they want him to do something – he replies that they are to do something – be witnesses.*] He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**" When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "**Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.**"

Luke 24:49-53

And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so **stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.**" Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.