

Easter 7, 2008  
Good Hope Lutheran Church  
Acts 1: 6 – 14

The first reading for today comes to us from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, and it tells of the day, 40 days after Easter, when the Lord Jesus ascended back up into heaven. And after Jesus had ascended into heaven, we read in verse 10 that the disciples were still standing there, glued to the spot, gazing up into the sky. When suddenly two angels like traffic cops showed up and said, “What are you looking at, nothing to see here, move it along, move it along. This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will one day return the same way.”

The Word of God.

Lord now let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our spirits all be acceptable in your sight this day, o Lord our rock and our redeemer, AMEN.

Back at my congregation in Indiana. I got a phone call one day, asking me to visit another congregation in the area, to spend a day or two with them, as a consultant. You see, this other congregation was struggling with its mission and ministry, they wanted me to come in and, consult with their council, at a weekend retreat. I got to tell you, *consultant* is easily the trendiest thing I have ever been called. And not only was I a *consultant* that day—this other congregation was also more than 50 miles from my home, which made me an expert too!—you know how that works. Anyway, I went, and I, consulted.

This other congregation had been in place, for over 100 years. In its early days, in the middle of a small city, why every Sunday morning doors would open and tow-headed blonde children with names like Hansel and Gretel and Fritz and Helga would come streaming out; “and we had 200 children a week in Sunday School back then. 200 children, pastor!” But lately the neighborhood had changed. Not as many kids, and the ones who were there now had names like Pedro and Miguel and Josephine and Maria. And they weren’t blonde any more, either. Sunday School attendance, had dropped to fewer than 40 a week. What to do now?

Enter, stage left, the consultant. We talked for a while, about mission and ministry, and the possibilities that were open to them. Among other things—this is for real—among other things, sitting on that church council was the local high school Spanish teacher. Does that make you

think maybe of a bilingual ministry, maybe of ways of helping these new families assimilate? I consulted, and I thought we came up with a pretty good list of ideas, new things to try in the name of Jesus Christ right here, right now.

When I was done, they looked at me and said, “We had 200 children a week in Sunday School back then. 200 children, pastor!”

Rooted in place, gazing off into the sky, longing for the past, folks in that congregation were having trouble moving ahead. I think that’s a fair assessment. In that sense, they were a lot like the disciples, in Acts chapter 1. These disciples had spent three years roaming the countryside, in the presence of none other than Jesus Christ. And the miracles they had witnessed in those three years, are beyond description. Sight to the blind, strength of limb to the lame. Demons expelled, loaves of bread multiplied, lepers cleansed, and on yeah by the way—this thing, what’s it called? Easter! Jesus had died on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins—they’d seen the cross they’d heard the nails they’d witnessed the death—they’d seen Him resurrected on Easter. They’d talked with Him, eaten breakfast with Him, Jesus the Son of God raised from the dead! Now He was gone, back up into heaven, and they’d watched Him go. And they just couldn’t move, rooted in place, gazing off into the sky; longing for the past. Till two angels came along—not consultants mind you, not experts with great ideas—angels, with a word from God. Get moving. Jesus will be back one day, till then. Get on with it.

Nostalgia may be, the most human of emotions—that’s something to ponder this week if you want. Nostalgia may be the most human of emotions, we all experience it, we all understand it. Nostalgia is a very human feeling, that can also frankly be debilitating, and destructive. Now obviously the past can be a source of wisdom, the past can be a foundation for the present and future. It just can’t be a substitute, for the present and future, that’s all—though sometimes, we’d like it to be.

But the call of God is always pulling us forward, into the world around us; the call of God is always pulling us into the future. As Jesus said, His last words on earth before disappearing into

heaven, “You will receive power, when the Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, to the very ends of the earth.” And we are—we can be—we will be, because we know and believe, the best is yet to come. If there is anything we teach and believe as Christians, this is it—the best is yet to come. Trust God and see. The Lord will come again. All things shall be made right. It’s out there, that day is coming, in the future. It’ll be here soon.

Nostalgia is very human, and very powerful, but I think as Christians we need to understand what the word really means. It’s Greek. The English word nostalgia is derived from the Greek word nostos—n-o-s-t-o-s—and nostos means, a homecoming. The school has a homecoming dance and a homecoming football game, well if the school was Athens Greece it would be a nostos dance and a nostos football game. Nostos, homecoming, fine. You just have to know, where home is. You have to know where home is, that’s all, it’s not behind you, in some past no matter how treasured. Home is ahead of you home—is heaven. Home is the kingdom. Home is the promised presence of God, which is ours now and will be forever, through Christ our Lord. You can be as nostalgic as you want—your life can be dominated by nostalgia—just remember that nostalgia is about going home, and home is ahead of you, not behind; in the Kingdom of our God and Father. May that great day come quickly, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.