

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

June 1, 2014

Seventh Sunday of Easter/  
Ascension Sunday Year A

The readings this week:

- Acts 1:6-14 ◦ Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35
- 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11 ◦ John 17:1-11

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## Blessing in the Leaving

Throughout this Easter season we have seen how the gospel lections have emphasized the theme of *knowing*: knowing the risen Christ, knowing what he has done for us and to us, knowing what he desires of us and calls us to do, knowing what he is preparing for us—and preparing us for. The fact that most of the gospel readings for the Easter season take place at a table underscores the intimacy that comes in knowing—in knowing Christ, in knowing God, in knowing one another.

This theme of knowing reaches its stunning apex in the gospel texts for this week. The reading from John's Gospel draws us once again to the table where Jesus has lingered with his friends on the night before his death. He finishes their final feast by praying for his disciples. In his prayer, Jesus is *knowing* all over the place: "And this is eternal life," he says, "that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent...I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world...Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you." Then Jesus, who knows these friends so well, releases them into the world and into the care and protection of God, who has known them from the beginning.

In the reading from Luke for Ascension Day, we see the risen Christ appearing one last time to his disciples. He opens their minds, as Luke tells us, "to understand the scriptures," and he impresses upon them that what was written about him, they have seen with their own eyes. Jesus then takes them to Bethany: this place so familiar and dear to Jesus, the place where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived—his close friends who knew and were known by Jesus. And from this place Jesus leaves, blessing his beloved companions as he ascends.

As we spiral back around these stories this year, what still takes hold of me is this: how Jesus prays for and blesses his friends as he leaves them. How the leaving is part of the blessing. As if the blessing can happen no other way than by his departure, by his letting go of the ones whom he has loved—these ones whom he will never cease to love but must release into their own lives, so that they may enter into the blessing and enact it on this earth.

This week provides a good occasion to remember that the English word *bless* comes from the Old English word *blod*—blood, referring to the use of blood in ritual acts of consecration. The blessing that Jesus gives as he goes is one that will infuse the community with his love, his grace, his lifeblood. He gives a blessing that will run in the veins of those he has called to be his body; a blessing that will beat in the hearts of those whom he is sending into the world.

As we prepare to leave the season of Easter and cross into Ordinary Time, what blessing do you need? What word or gesture of grace and love do you need to infuse you and sustain you to be a blessing in this world? Is there a blessing that might depend on your letting go, on releasing something—or seeking to be released from something—so that there will be a space for the blessing to enter?

[Jan Richardson, \*The Painted Prayer Prayerbook\*](#)



## Reflecting on the Word



"A father  
to the  
fatherless..."

Psalm 68



### 1st Reading: Acts 1:6-14

Put yourself in the shoes of the apostles. How would you feel if you were the first to be given the task described in verse 8? How are we equipped for this task, according to the passage? When has your faith in Jesus Christ been encouraged by the words of others? How is your hope and confidence in Jesus affected by what you learn about him in the passage? How are you affected when you pray with other believers—especially as you consider your part in God's mission for the church (v. 14)? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

### Psalm Reading: Psalm 68:1-2, 32-35

If we know that God is indeed present and if we know that He is active in the affairs of men, how can we be downcast or discouraged or depressed? What is the opportunity for ministry in our time? If the Lord can protect and provide for His beloved Israel in that terrible desert, what more can He do for us in our own time and place? [Lostpine.com](#)

*"Strange that so few come to the woods to see how the pine lives and grows and spires, lifting its evergreen arms to the light – to see its perfect success."*

~ Henry David Thoreau ~

## Praying Toward Sunday

*Christ, friend, mentor...  
In that upper room you gathered us close,  
You prayed for us and blessed us,  
Promised to protect us.  
You shared your Father,  
Shared your life,  
Gave your all.*

*Remind us to hold fast to your words,  
The knowledge you share,  
The blessings you give so freely.  
Help us to know and understand ~  
Those words are living today,  
That love is there for today.*

*Draw me to that upper room,  
Let me bask in the intimacy you long to have with me  
The relationship you give,  
The friend that you are.*

*Amen*

## The Power of One

...If we think of the words that describe human suffering, we notice that they are words describing states moving from One-ness. Disassociation, Depression, Division, Divorce, Ex-Communication, Alienation, Rejection, Apartheid. Divisive, splitting words, describing what is worst about human suffering; the Edenic Alienation from the Garden of Unity. Our exile from The One.

Conversely, when we speak of the good, the true and the beautiful aspects of the human condition and mission, we reach for words like, CommUNITY, CommUNION, Compassion, Integration, Reconciliation, Reunion, Wholeness. Wondrous and healing words. Words that describe the entire life of Jesus, living as he did out of his singularity with God. The return to The One.

Small wonder it was Jesus' deepest desire and prayer for us, his divided and conflicted followers, "*Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*"

Excerpt from [Do You Really Want One?](#) by Peter Woods

### 3rd Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

According to these verses in chapter 4, what are some right and wrong ways for a Christian to suffer? With what different beings or groups do these verses describe a Christian's relationships? What reasons did Peter give for following each of the commands in verses 5:5-9? God's Word speaks to us in a variety of ways. What joy, comfort or warning do Peter's instructions in verses 5-11 point to in your own experience? How could Peter's teachings about relationships in this chapter help you to "stand fast" in your own faith? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

### 4th Reading: John 17:1-11

Jesus makes only one request for himself—that the Father would glorify him so that he might glorify the Father. In what way would each one glorify the other (vv. 1-5)? Why do you think that was so important to Jesus? According to verses 6-11, what specific ministries did Jesus have toward his disciples? Twice Jesus asked the Father to protect his disciples from the evil one. Why would that protection have been so important in Jesus' mind as he faced the cross? Jesus obviously prayed this prayer out loud to bring comfort and assurance to his disciples. In what particular ways do Jesus' words encourage or assure you? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)