

ASECENSION 2013
May 12. 2013

Theme: Transitions

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On my way to and from our annual priests' convocation in Charleston this past week, I listened to an absorbing and disturbing book entitled The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers.

The book is the first person story of an American soldier transitioning from particularly torturous duty in Iraq to life back home.

Powers wrote of how difficult it was for him to discover what "normal" was once again and, given how many civilians he had killed, how painful he found it when people came up and thanked him for his service.

You'll have to read the book yourself to find out why.

But I began to think about other transitions that are part of our lives:

---the transition when a spouse or a parent dies, especially the last surviving parent.

---the transition of retirement, or an empty nest, or losing a long-held job and reentering the job market.

---the transition of a divorce, of graduating from school and entering the work world, of picking up and moving to a new city – I've done that eight times in my career.

Many such transitions can mean a shattering of what is familiar and comfortable and embarking into the uncomfortable, the unknown: though sometimes and for some among us it is an adventure and a time of high creativity and energy.

Perhaps something can be mined from the example of the **first disciples** of Jesus as they **transitioned** from the Presence of his Risen Body to the Presence of his Risen Spirit.

We heard **two versions** of the Ascension today, both we believe from the hand of St. Luke, the first from his Acts of the Apostles and the second from his Gospel.

And in both accounts the departing Jesus tells his apostles to wait in the city, to stay in Jerusalem, until the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, comes upon them.

We know from the rest of the story, after the Ascension of Jesus they did indeed go back to Jerusalem and **wait**; they waited ten days before the windy Spirit blew on them and dropped down tongues of fire on their heads.

So do you think they just sat around and **played cards, ate matzo ball soup and drank Mogen David wine** for ten days?

Undoubtedly they **thought and they prayed; they conversed and debated**; they **argued and they probably fought**:

Now what should we do?

Be his witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, to the ends of the earth, he said.

Where do we even begin? How do we go about it?

Those ten days between the Ascension of the Risen Jesus and the Descent of the Pentecostal Spirit were **a time of transition** for the first church.

It was a time for them to **come to terms** with their many thoughts and emotions, to, as we say, process what they had experienced and decide where they were headed.

Only when they had this time of transition **were they ready** for the empowering Spirit to descend on them.

So **what is the Gospel, the Good News**, for us in this message?

Surely it must be to be patient with ourselves and to **allow ourselves such time of transition:**

But at the end of the transition time to **expect the power and the energy of the Spirit** of the Risen Jesus!

Transition times are by definition times of **turmoil and confusion**; they often lack clarity of direction – just think of Peter and the other Apostles walking back to Jerusalem trying to figure out: now what do we do?

When a beloved spouse dies there is bound to be an extended transition time of grief and nothing can bring him or her back.

But in time, and with the help of family, friends and maybe even grief counseling, a rich, happy, joyful life can be restored.

Perhaps we must transition into a new understanding of ourselves as a **diabetic** and all that means for our diet and life style,

...maybe we are finally transitioning into an acceptance of an **addiction** to some substance alcohol or prescription medication or behavior such a gambling or overeating or internet pornography,

...perhaps your transition is the joyous one of going from a **single person to becoming a married couple,**

The Good News is that while we must work through the many changes in attitudes and behaviors new circumstances require of us, on the other side of the transition is the **power and energy of the Spirit.**

That Spirit gives us what we need to **move into those new circumstances boldly and creatively.**

Many of us here today can attest to ways the Spirit was there to lift us up and carry through times we otherwise did not know how we would have made it.

So too the experience of the first church.

Come back next Sunday to hear what happened after their ten days of transition between the Ascension of the Risen Jesus and the Descent of his Pentecostal Spirit.