

Sunday, May 21, 2023 ***“That all May be One!”***

Acts 1: 6-11 John 17:1-11

Jigsaw puzzles made a comeback in popularity during the pandemic as they are seen as an activity that everyone can do. Why? Because doing a puzzle is simple match the pieces by their shape and colour and put them together to get a bigger picture. As one does puzzles you realize that some are more difficult than others because of the unique photos involved or because there is a dominant colour and the challenge is always in finding the correct piece. But there is something about coming to the completion of the puzzle when all the pieces fit and especially when they are all present. When this happens, the puzzle just seems to pop up and be seen for the entire picture is emphasized and not just one section. All the pieces come together and instead of being identified as a ‘sky’ piece; or a piece of grass; the pieces when joined are one larger image.

Not everyone likes this kind of puzzle however they do see the value in putting one’s focus on the pieces in order to get the larger picture clearer. This is what Jesus was trying to do as he shared in ministry with his disciples.

Throughout the time Jesus travelled with his disciples, he taught, preached and healed people with his words. He performed miracles as God’s Son and tried telling the disciples what was going to happen in time. Jesus knew that his purpose was to die and rise again. He is the Son of God, the Promised one made mention in prophesies and he was the one whom God sent to live as a man amongst the people of faith. These chosen people were committed to seeing God’s purpose fulfilled as they believed in the Promised One who was to come and save them from sin. And Jesus was committed to them just as Jesus calls us to follow, he prayed for the disciples and what God had called them to do.

Our reading from John 17 takes place prior to the action of Jesus’ arrest, trial and ultimately crucifixion. He has been teaching the disciples about the Holy Spirit and tells them that the time would come soon that all will be understood as he would soon be arrested. Jesus prays and he knows that the time has come for the prophesy to be fulfilled; for his purpose to

be played out in real time, for the disciples to scatter and for his identity as the Promised One, Son of God to be revealed in the few days to come.

Jesus prays to God the Father and recounts what he has done- making God's name known to the disciples and how they have grown in their understanding. They believe in Jesus as God's Son but he is concerned for them and prays that these disciples will be one as God the Father and Jesus the Son are One. Jesus knows that when they travelled together, he protected them, guarded them and all but one continued to follow in faith. Jesus asks that these close friends will have Jesus' joy made complete in themselves. He asks God to protect them from evil' to sanctify them in truth and to be with them. In His prayer, Jesus shares with God how much he cares about these people- whom he has trusted with the ministry he started, the message of love and hope and asks God that they may be one. One in mind, heart and purpose.

As a United Church, Glenwood is a part of this One in mind, heart and purpose. The United Church came into being on June 10, 1925—with a special celebration of worship being held in a most Canadian setting- Mutual Street Arena in Toronto. It was then that the founding denominational representatives gathered to share and enact a vision of unity- of being one with each other one in Christ. These churches—Methodist, Congregational and many Presbyterians joined together uniting as one new denomination of Christian church under an act of Canadian Parliament that established the United Church of Canada. As part of the church's crest, the Latin words "*Ut Omnes Unum Sint*" which translated means—"That all may be one" reflects Jesus' prayers for His disciples and calls us to be more than one or two pieces in the puzzle of this United Church of ours. We are called to be One with each other and one in Christ.

But how are we becoming one- in this place we call our church family? How are we seeking and growing as children of God, followers of Jesus and as individuals who seek to know God and grow in relationship with Him?

On this last Sunday of this Easter Season we are reminded of what we celebrated just 6 weeks ago—Christ's resurrection from death. Jesus was crucified and buried. But he rose from death, met people, saw people, ate with his disciples and continued to teach them about what

was to come and how they would not be abandoned. Jesus' teaching to those disciples is for us as well. Because we are not alone.

Jesus presented himself alive to many people and spoke about the kingdom of God. He told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of God. Jesus told them to patiently wait as they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. These disciples needed to be assured again and again that they would not be abandoned. They needed to know that God would look after them—and this is because Jesus prayed to God for this to occur. Jesus trusted these close friends for he knew their hearts and minds. He knew their gifts and capabilities and he knew that God would take care of them as they continued the work they had started together.

Jesus also knew that he is to return to the Father. Over 33-34 years have passed since he left heaven and he wanted to go back to be with God. It was always a part of the plan that Jesus the Son of God would return to sit on the right hand of the creator.

On the 40th day after his resurrection Jesus and the disciples are together. They ask him about the time when Israel will be restored? His response is quick—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, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Then the disciples just watched. 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."

What is important about Jesus' ascension into heaven? First- when Jesus is lifted up into heaven, it demonstrates the earthly work necessary for our salvation is finished. All that was needed for Jesus Christ to rescue, ransom, and redeem people has been accomplished. There's nothing more Jesus needs to do to make us the sons and daughters of God. Secondly, in His

present work, Jesus is our advocate, our mediator, and our high priest. (1 John 2:1 says: "...we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one.")

Third, the ascension of Jesus Christ means the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is within us. Jesus prepared His followers for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16 He tells them, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever." He builds on this a little later in John 16:7. Jesus says to His disciples, "Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you." Jesus as the ascended Christ sends the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God indwells us and is with us forever. As our helper, He guides us into all truth (John 16:13). This permanent and guiding helper, this Spirit of God, indwells every believer. Without the ascension of Christ, there's no indwelling Spirit.

A fourth reason that the ascension is important is that Jesus will take us to Himself in heaven. If we believe, we have peace within knowing that we will spend eternity with Jesus Christ in heaven. For when we die, we will be received by Jesus in heaven!

As we prepare to welcome God's Spirit and celebrate Pentecost we need to be reminded that we are not alone in what we have learned. The disciples watched Jesus as he ascended into heaven. And here we are over 2000 years later—talking about Jesus bringing us together as his faithful followers. Maybe the idea of life being like a puzzle is good. And like the words of a song by Survivor- The group that brought "Eye of the Tiger" to Rocky; we need to reflect on what is stated in this song (Ever since the world began).

... And we're just another piece of the puzzle Just another part of the plan

How one life touches the other; Is so hard to understand

Still we walk this road together; we try and go as far as we can

And we have waited for this moment in time, Ever since the world began.

We also need to hear again Jesus' prayer- that all may be one-if we truly believe and have faith that God is leading and guiding us as individuals and as a church family. So let us walk this road together not gazing up to the sky but do what Jesus has called each of us to do. Tell others the Good News of Christ's resurrection. For Jesus is alive; Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed. Thanks be to God.

LET US PRAY

Holy God of grace and love, we praise you for Jesus who died and rose again for our sake. We heard his prayer so that his disciples would be cared for until the Spirit came. We thank you for their work amongst people so much so that even after 2000 years Jesus' passion story is still told. And the Holy Spirit dwells within the heart of those who believe. We pray that we may do your will as faithful people and continue to tell this story of life and hope. We pray that you would enable us to understand and know our role as one piece of your puzzle of creation. Hear us O God as we listen to your voice; speak to us O God. Move your Spirit amongst us now.

SILENCE> In the name of the One who ascended into heaven and whose Spirit is with us now.
Amen.