

*"Resist and Begin Again...A Blessed
New Normal"*

*"There's A Place Somewhere Over
The Rainbow...Right Here!"*

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; Acts 1:6-14
May 24, 2020
Ascension Sunday

"Come Back! Come Back!"

Almost every American knows the scene...Dorothy thinking she's going back to Kansas at last...

thinking the wizard will take her with him...make magic for her and solve her problems. Surely this is the time.

She's thinking she will be "returned to a new normal" without any further effort...having helped her friends get brains, courage, a heart. Friends who kept saying: If only I had a ____, then everything would be different. So many reasons...excuses to stay stuck in the old normal.

But instead, the *wizard* ascends into the clouds and Dorothy is left right where she is in the old normal...feels abandoned, orphaned...only to find...she has always had the power to go home...it was within her all the time... in her,

the power of her truth alongside the wisdom formed by all her new experiences and insights.

Wisdom gained through much travail but with an open spirit seeking truth with a can-do attitude.

She got wise about wizards & witches: the tricksters in life!

She came to understand they don't have any more power than she has...but boy they know how to talk a good talk and put on a good show!

And she fell for it at first...haven't you?

But she got wiser about tricksters and confronted them... She tapped into the power people have as they truly care for each other and help each other and sacrifice for each other.

How much power we have together!

Indeed, unless we all help each other,
no one may get where they want
to go!

Here's the thing:

I wonder if the disciples felt similarly bereft as they saw the wrinkled soles of Jesus' feet fade up into the clouds?

I picture them standing there, squinting until their eyes water and their necks grow stiff, as they watch their window to God disappear, yelling: Come back, come back. Oh no, no, you can't leave us here like this! We're counting on you.

...And actually, God doesn't!

They too had the power all the time...something they too had to realize on their own.

The window to God did not disappear...it's been there the whole time...it's right there within each one...open, within.

Jesus told them it would be so...they would be filled with the power and protected as they became one with each other and one with God. It's their work to do now...and you can do it!

Tap those heals together!

And...the angels reveal the way...home...to a blessed new reality. BUT...here's the thing: it leads them back to Jerusalem...the very city where their troubles abound...go there! The place of confrontation. You have to confront the old normal!

It is in the very center of our real lives where power is needed!

They and we must step out on our own now...click our heels and take those first steps and head back to Jerusalem.

This is how a child grows into an adult or an adult into true maturity, which has nothing to do with age but self-awareness.

At some point, knowing what you now know to be true...
(BTW, forgive yourself for what you didn't know before you knew it!)
...at some point...knowing what you now know to be true,
you have to live your new life out there on your own.
The rubber hits the road.

Just before that closing scene in the movie, do you remember the climatic confrontation when the wicked witch yells: "Surrender Dorothy"...thinking she had Dorothy cornered?

And just when the witch's broom catches on fire. And Dorothy doesn't just stand there, she acts. Dorothy throws a bucket of water on the witch and she melts! "I'm melting. I'm melting...oh what a world! Who would have thought a good little girl like you could destroy my beautiful wickedness."

The moment is not lost on us!

We are not to surrender to doom and gloom and our fears...to normalcy, but to think, respond to the new situation at hand, give the help that's most needed

now...

letting go of our previously normal ways! We are to confront wickedness and injustice...

after all, we're not in Kansas anymore either!

Like Dorothy, we have the power within us to go "home" anytime we are ready!
That somewhere over the rainbow is right here!

We've followed the yellow brick road as far as it will take us, seeking heart, brain, and courage, facing our doubts and helped every step along the way.

Having all we need, all we want is...*to come home.*

We "tap together the heels of our ruby slippers...stand on ours souls...

And when we awake, we find ourselves home where everything is the same and nothing is the same.

A blessed new normal.

You see...*it was time.*

Jesus had taught them and had shown them everything He could giving them confidence...doubts and all! They resisted at first wishing he, anyone else! Would do it for them.

Just as it is true now,

at some point they had to live life out there on their own.

The choices have to made, not just talked about:

...the child needs to let go of its parent's hand and go through the door to kindergarten.

...As a child, you go down to the baseball field with your buddies with no adults around to supervise you.

...You go out with your friends on Friday night as a teenager.

...You have to walk through a water cooler meeting of a clique at work.

...You hear something hard to believe at church.

...Your life partner belittles your choices or someone else's without regard.

At some point, each of us has to make "the faith" our own.

Faith is not a set of ideas but a way of living.

And, no one can live your life for you.

Who better than Jesus knows how hard this is to do
and yet, true life begins only as you do...
and you know the truth of this!

So...no, Jesus didn't leave because He didn't care.
He left because He does care. Because it's up to you.

Your life is up to you.

And your choices make a difference in the grand scheme of things.
He leaves giving a promise of power.
Not the power of this world, but of the cosmos!

So, *can you imagine the next scene?*

As the disciples are directed by the messengers to return to Jerusalem. ...*I can hear them now...*

"Darn! Anywhere but there where we are most likely to be betrayed, where the work is hardest to do, and the wicked prevail? No way! I don't want to confront that!"

Yes way!

That's exactly where you *have* to go in order for anything to be different. Move toward the hardest place, the tension, live facing forward...confronting your own Jerusalem.

With the exception of abusive situations,
the only place we can go to make life different
is the place where it most needs to be different.

You can practice, sift and sort, get clearer,
get nourished...

but eventually you have to walk the talk...

you have to go back to Jerusalem where the thing that's
changed most is you and that changes everything.

You moved through Bethlehem and Jerusalem, came down off that cross, and now having had 40 days of questions and doubts,

you have to go back and confront the life that nailed you.
That old normal!...

Ahh...but where exactly in Jerusalem did they go?

The upper room...the same upper room in which they ate with Jesus his last supper, our first communion.

...A safe place with safe friends where they can think...
and move out into the rest of their lives. Hint! Hint!

We all need an upper room where we can take time to just breathe and process, to think. ...a safe place to reflect upon what of the old normal is worth returning to
and who you will be
in the coming new normal.

Together we have had the space and time to heal enough
to have some confidence
to confront that which needs confronting.

We each need that upper room moment in our lives and then move forward.

Remember, when Dorothy returned to Kansas...it was still Kansas.

And those who gathered around her bed as she opened her eyes had not changed.
She Changed!

She'd have only a few Upper Room moments to decide to deny that whole thing...OR

find a way to make meaning of her experience
and be a new Dorothy!

But a few Upper Room moments can be enough!

Are you now able to resist the old normal mind trap:

But I've always done it this way?

I'll just try harder.

I don't have to change, they do!

It's not my fault!

It's out of my power to affect it.

If there is a God, then God will do it...for me!

It is so easy to claim as God's work what may simply be ours
to do: up against cultural norms...our usual ways,
faulty judgments and assumptions!

**Often we align what seems to be in our best interest
with what we want**

to be in God's best interest.
We refuse to go...back to Kansas!

It's Ascension Sunday.
And thank God, literally, it is not the end of the story or the end of the help.

Yes, ordinary time is coming where we live newly or not.

But first we receive a powerful gift that
will enable us be grounded...

so we can stand tall against wicked ways,
the usual ways of the world. Pentecost is coming.

**Be with us strong to stand against usual ways,
able to do all things together.**

As hard as the choices may be in life,
as scared or as angry as we may have reason to be,

we are not frozen, unable to move forward.

We are chosen.....made able to live in Jerusalem...everything is looking up!

Somewhere over the rainbow...is...right here!

We are the new humanity. We are that blessed new normal.