

Today (during the 10:30 service) we are taking the opportunity to remember and bless our seniors in high school—to hold them in prayer as they look forward to moving out into the world of work and college and life as adults. It is a rich time in their lives—a time brimming with excitement and hope, but also with questions and “unknowns”. No doubt we can all relate— as a congregation we find ourselves in much the same place this morning, as we anticipate moving to a new Sunday service schedule next week. It is for all of us, to some extent, a season of anticipation and anxiety.

So what might God’s Word have to say to all of us in this season of transitions? In considering today’s scriptures, I came to the following conclusion—in the midst of uncertainty God doesn’t give us answers. He gives us a sandwich, a “Call Sandwich on Promise Bread”, to be precise.

Today’s lesson from Acts provides us with an example. The apostles have gathered with the Risen Christ. They are still a little disoriented by the fact that Jesus, who was crucified, continues to appear, utterly “undead”, among them. They’re somewhat disoriented; they’re probably dealing with a bunch of conflicting emotions—ranging from grief to elation, anger to relief; and they’re certainly filled with questions. The question they actually put to Jesus in this lesson is probably only one of many. It’s a question filled with anticipation—but it can also be read as a sort of challenge. They ask, ““Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” Like, “So Jesus, are you going to do something or what?” But Jesus doesn’t give them the answer they want. He doesn’t even offer them a timeline, to allay their anxieties. Instead he says, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” That’s not what they wanted to hear. That’s not usually what we want to hear, either.

So our lesson started out with a question. Then came the bad news. Next comes the Sandwich. First, a promise: Jesus says, “It is not for you to know all the details of what’s in store, but you should know that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” Then the call: “and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Immediately following the Call, Jesus appears to, well, disappear. He seems to withdraw. The scriptures say He is lifted up into the sky, and disappears into a cloud. Yet even as the apostles are gazing up into the sky, wondering where Jesus has gone, two Messengers appears to complete the sandwich with a second promise: “This Jesus,” they say “who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go.”

I think that we can find, in this story, an astonishing parallel with, and paradigm for, our own experience. We’ve got a question. We want to know God’s plan. What’s more, we want to know exactly how and when God’s plan is going to unfold. But when

we start talking to God about it, he doesn't give us any satisfactory answers. Instead he gives us a call. We are called to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. In the midst of our uncertainty, we are called to make choices that witness to the radical, reconciling, abundant love and life of God. And if that weren't hard enough, very often we find that just as soon as we've heard God's call, Jesus seems to withdraw, to disappear. But the lesson suggests that when this happens, we should not lose heart—for God's Call does not come to us in isolation. Just like the Call to the apostles, God's Call to us is both preceded and followed by a promise. First, there is the promise that we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Then there is the promise that Jesus *will* come to us—suddenly, surprising, unexpectedly.

I wonder what questions are utmost on your mind this morning. How will I pay for college? Will I be healed from my cancer? Delivered from my grief? What will our New Sunday mornings look like? When will God send me a date, or a spouse, or a child? What should I do with my life?

And I wonder how God might be calling you to be His witness in the midst of that uncertainty. And mostly I wonder, with tremendous curiosity and hope, in what delightful and unexpected ways God is going to come to you and reveal himself to you in your process of heeding His Call.

Promise. Call. Promise. What's so amazing about the pattern we find in today's reading, is that it represents the essential structure of our entire lives, perhaps even the whole arc of creation—birth, life, death. Promise. Call. Promise. It is a pattern that undergirds our liturgy, as well. This is particularly evident in the Baptismal Liturgy, which we celebrate next Sunday, the liturgy that defines our identity as members of Christ's Body. Promise. Call. Promise. The first promise is marked by an anointing: "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever." The call comes in the form of the Baptismal Covenant: It is essentially the same call that we find in the Acts lesson, fleshed out in greater detail. Will you continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers? Will you persevere in resisting evil and whenever you fall into sin, repent, and return to the Lord? Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? The pattern finds its completion in a holy feast: with the promise that Jesus will come to you and give you his own life—body and blood—to feed and strengthen you to heed his Call.

So whatever questions or uncertainty you might be facing today, or this week, or in the years to come I want you to remember—when you most want an answer, God's probably going to give you a Sandwich, a Call Sandwich on Promise Bread. So be attentive--look and listen carefully for the Call God has for you. And know that, as you enter into that call, you are sandwiched-surrounded on every side- by God's unfailing promises.

Amen.