

Dear Friends,

Luke 24: 49

It's the evening of the day of the resurrection. The risen Jesus is talking with his friends. In Luke's gospel, his last words to them are to tell them to get ready to receive the Holy Spirit. He says, "stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high".

The word that is translated "stay" really means "sit down". I love that. Jesus is saying to you, "please, just sit down and sit still. Stop all of your fussing and fretting. Don't be agitated or anxious. Your side of this is effortless. There is nothing you have to do. There is nothing that you have to achieve. There is nowhere for you to go. Just sit still and wait patiently for God to do God's work".

There is another word for this attitude of being open and receptive, this attitude of patient waiting, of sitting still. The other word for it is prayer. That's what the friends of Jesus do. Part two of Luke's gospel is the Acts of the Apostles. That begins where the gospel ends. The friends of Jesus do, at the beginning of Acts, what Jesus instructed them to do at the end of the gospel. They wait. In their waiting, they sit still in prayer. Luke says this, they "were constantly devoting themselves to prayer".

Perhaps, as they did this, they remembered what Jesus said when he taught them how to pray. He said, "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door". I wonder what room we are meant to go into for prayer. Recently, I asked you to imagine Jesus saying to you, "where is my guest room?" He asks you to prepare a guest room, a spacious place within yourself for him. You could call it your heart, or your inner core. Jesus invites you to join him in that space, to go in and shut the door. You close the door on all the distractions, the thoughts, the chattering, the inner dialogue in your mind.

That of course is easier said than done. Our minds are made to think and think they will. Our minds want a constant stream of stimulation. Do you get in the car and turn on the radio, or go into an empty house and turn on the television? Anything rather than have silence and emptiness. Or if we have a time of quiet in a service does your mind immediately give you something to think about to fill the space. That's normal.

But Jesus does say, "go into your room and shut the door". One of the early Christians called Evagrius described prayer as "the laying aside of thought". I really like that. He's not so unrealistic as to suggest that there will be no thinking. Our minds go on doing that. But he does suggest that you can patiently and in a disciplined way lay aside those thoughts. You can say, "mind be still. Mind, it's not your turn now, it's the turn of the heart". You may sit still, and rest in an attitude of patient waiting in this place where you are one with God.

I recently saw an example of this in a film. In the film, Joe is helping Ruben who is struggling with addiction. Joe suggests to Ruben that he gets up early each morning, goes into a room, sits down and does nothing. When he can no longer do nothing, then he is to write. No one will read what he writes; he just has to get the thoughts out and write as much as he can. Then, when he can no longer write, he is to go back to doing nothing. He is to do that every day. Later in the film Joe asks Ruben if, while he has been doing this, he has experienced any moments of stillness. Joe then describes his own experience. He says, "that stillness, that place, that's the kingdom of God".

Jesus invites you to be open and ready. He calls you to sit down and sit still, to constantly devote yourself to prayer while you wait patiently for God to fill you with the Spirit.

God bless you,

Tony