

NOW AND NEXT

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

May 17, 2026

Easter 7

Acts 1:6-14 (dramatized)

Mary: Jesus, it is good to be with you on this hill called Olivet. I am wondering: is this the time when you will restore our people and our nation to its glory?

Jesus: It is not for you to know when God chooses to do things. But I will say that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Now, it is time for me to leave.

Mary: Look, he's being lifted up. A cloud is taking him out of sight.

Angel: People 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.

Mary: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James, let's go back to Jerusalem. All of us – and the rest of the followers and Jesus' family – will constantly devote ourselves to prayer



It has been six weeks since Easter Sunday and today in the calendar of the church year is the final Sunday in the season of Easter. For the first few days after Easter, we heard resurrection appearances with the disciples. And then we kind of talked a little bit about things that they were remembering about Jesus. But today we get that one last time of the disciples with the risen Jesus.

Easter was April 5th this year. If you remember, the temperature on Easter Sunday was about zero degrees, which is about what it was when I got up this morning. But I'm pretty sure if you live in this part of the world, you know that we haven't been just sitting at zero for 6 weeks. We have gone up to plus 20s. We've been down to minus 20s. It's been a journey that is not just a straight path.

The book of Acts is really a sequel in the Bible. It's a sequel to the book of Luke. Acts even starts with the author saying, "In my former book, I talked about all the things that Jesus did and said right up till after his death when he appeared to his disciples. We got the story of the empty tomb. The women not being believed that the tomb was empty. Not being believed when they said that angels had told them that Jesus had raised; weren't believed until Jesus was actually experienced by others: showed wounds, broke bread, ate fish, and said, "Peace be with you. The story goes that Jesus spent some 40 days with this group of close disciples and taught them about what the Realm of God was all about.

Today we heard three parting words from Jesus. One that the future is not yet known. Another that there is a

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promise that they will be guided by the spirit even if they're not guided physically by Jesus. And, third, Jesus telling his followers, you're going to be my witnesses from now on. I'm not going to go around doing all the teaching. You're going to be the one who witnessed to what we've learned and done together. And then there's that image of Jesus just floating away. Have you ever released a helium balloon and then just kind of watched it getting smaller and smaller and smaller and then you lose it for a second and you search, oh, there it is again. I spotted it one more time. Oh, it's way over there. I didn't think it would get that high. And eventually you get to the point where you're straining and you're looking, but you can't see it anymore. But you know it's there. It's just too far away. Maybe the clouds are a little lower. You maybe you're not sure which way the wind took it and you keep looking even after it's gone out of sight for a while. That's exactly what I picture the disciples doing. Still looking: can we still see Jesus even long after the last one of them caught a glimpse.

Their blank stares into the sky are interrupted by two white robed strangers. Now, these could very well be the same two white robed strangers that Mary and Joanna and Mary and a bunch of other women with their spices saw at the empty tomb. And the reason why it sounds like it could be the same two white robed strangers is because they basically asked the same question to the women at the tomb as they asked to the disciples staring up at the sky. *Why are you looking there? You should be focusing your gaze somewhere else.* In Luke at the empty tomb, it was *why are you looking for the living among the dead? Go back and tell the others that Jesus is raised.* In Acts, what we heard today was *why are you looking up? go back to Jerusalem and begin that work of being the witnesses.* These angelic visitors, their purpose was to unstuck the disciples. You know, we can get we can get stuck especially with significant experiences. It's hard to move past significant experiences even when that experience is no longer impacting us. In Luke, they were still grieving. It had only been a few days. The women were at the tomb to give Jesus a proper burial. In Acts, they'd had 40 amazing days with the risen Christ, and maybe they didn't think that that needed to end.

The future may not yet be known. But the only way to learn what the future will become is to move on – onto what might come next. The white robes' advice was it's time to leave what was and leave that in the past. And it's time to live joyfully now and to live into what will be next.

You know me, I've always got to have a a musical theater reference. So, all I could think of was, "Look down. Look down. Don't look them in the eye." But the angels are not saying what Valjean did. They're not saying stop looking up and look down because that's just as narrowly focus. Looking up into a scattered sky is just as narrow as looking down into scattered dirt. It was look forward. Appreciate where you are right now and move into that time. Look to where you are. Be aware of where you might go next.

In fact, if we'd've read the next story in the book of Acts, we would hear that the disciples get back their number to twelve, that significantly important number representing the whole of the nation, bringing their number back to twelve because Judas isn't part of their group anymore. And so, they come up with a way of naming a new 12th disciple. And they say it's got to be someone who was here from the beginning, right from Jesus' baptism, which might have been before even some of the others and they had enough options that they actually had to have a little bit of an election of sorts.

The reason why the author of the gospel of Luke wrote a sequel was to talk about what happened next. *In my former book, I wrote about all the things that Jesus did right up to the day he left his disciples.* And then the next book talks about what the disciples do next. Their next role is not to be learning and following with Jesus, but to be witnessing to their experience and to create new experiences with others and to let the community of Jesus followers evolve, to witness to what led us here, but to need to always keep writing the story. As we said earlier, it's all about the story that we've been part of and that we're continuing to write.

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So now, focus on the joy. Focus on the praise and appreciation. Focus on the togetherness. The next is all about the possibility where we explore and we discover. That's what I talked about last week in church: the value of discovery. A baptism is a moment in time where we celebrate now but the promises that we made to each other are all what happens next. Lloyd is our minister emeritus: a recognition of a past relationship but it's focused on what's happening now and what might happen next.

The future is not yet known, but it's where we are leading. Next week, we're going to hear about the next big event that Jesus' disciples experienced together as they were moving from when then into the now and on to the next.

Let's pray.

Thank you, God, for this moment and for all that has led us here. And we are grateful that we are not alone as we make the next bits of our journey become real. Amen.

#28TLUS The Welcome Table

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