

When we were first married, we rented a place in Edmonton in married student residence. For the next thirteen years we also rented homes in Montreal, Camrose, Ft McMurray (two places) and when I came to find housing in Lethbridge, I was looking for a rental. We offered to rent the house that we ended up buying.

Then for many years afterward, we lived in the home we bought as though we were renters. We kept the walls white. We left up the unsightly curtain rods for whoever might live there next. We didn't make many home improvements after the initial painting all the walls white and replacing of worn carpeting.

Years later, when we transitioned out of living like renters, we took the curtain rods down. We chose colours for some of the walls in our home. We removed the front porches of concrete and replaced them with cedar and knocked out the deck rails that blocked our view in the back. We replaced many little windows with big ones. The old mentality of living in someone else's house was gone. For the last twenty or more years we have been present, here. I'm not sure what's coming as we age.

I think the Feast of the Ascension is about transition. In preparation for this talk I listened to Bonnie Thurston, a Carmelite sister's reflection on the Ascension¹. She focused on three words “Gone. Here. Coming.” It is not only,” she says, “Jesus coming here and gone, but gone, here and coming.” “Here, after the resurrection, Jesus is an empowering comforter,” she says. And still to come, in a way we don't understand.

What the stories today and her interpretation illustrate for me is a state of transition. What was is gone. And yet within us there live the memories of the old way. It is like our bodies crave the routine of that familiar relationship. We crave or cling to that sometimes. Once that's gone, we need time, forty days if you will, to adjust to the new reality, to the HERE, now.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples after his death, they were in transition between the Jesus they knew and walked with and learned from and this Jesus who suddenly or secretly appeared to them and made their hearts burn with recognition, but their heads spin in disbelief.

We see in gospel stories that the newly resurrected Christ tried to help them transition out of their shock. The gospels tell us things he did in those forty days to convince them that his resurrected body was theirs to be friends with. He called Mary's name in a voice and intonation that she recognized immediately. He walked with friends and taught them on the road to Emmaus. He accepted the invitation to come in and sit for supper that night. He himself made a fire on the beach, invited them over and cooked the fish they caught.

In today's reading he asked for something to eat. He's trying so hard to convince them to enter into a new relationship with him based on what was and yet, with him taken away up into the sky, it is very much based on a new reality of what was to come at Pentecost—a Spirit always with them.

Even though this person of Christ wanted them to be at home with him, their experience was that of not belonging – they were still in the rental house mentality. They were used to a certain way of being and not able to embrace this fellow who appeared in the room and disappeared again.

¹ Commentary for the Ascension of the Lord. Sr. Dr. Bonnie Thurston, 2020.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjDPccG3QeY&t=424s>

It would take the power of Holy Sophia at Pentecost for them to belong to that idea and that way of they themselves being Christ in the world.

So, Ascension is about the in between, but it's also about an intimacy between the earth and sky as Creator comes as flesh, is gone, returns and then takes his earthliness into the spirit-world. The disciples are left living in something of the old ways and waiting still for the new. Gone the human Jesus. Here the risen Christ Jesus and coming later on, an even greater glory.

I think that we transition often. In Canada the views and laws regarding Indigenous people and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks are slowly changing. Not because mainstream society wanted to change colonial ways and homophobic attitudes, but because the people themselves who are oppressed or persecuted stand up, risk their lives and like Jesus, say, Look at me! Listen to my voice! Give me something to eat. Let us convince you of our reality, our resistance, our resolve to be seen and believed as authentic. We will no longer live as not belonging. We make our home here among you. This is our territory.

And, like Jesus, (because the oppressed and persecuted *are* Jesus), they have been met with fear, like the disciples' fear. Transitions take time. The author of Luke puts the whole resurrection and ascension into one day, but later, in the book of Acts he or she or they extend that transition to forty days of encounters.

"Paradoxically, Jesus departs to be with us forever," says Thurston. And Jesus continues to work in us through Spirit, empowering and transitioning. I think the last part of the poem by Malcolm Guite today, "Ascension," captures this idea well.

"He took us with him to the heart of things
The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted
is whole and Heaven-centred now, and sings,
Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,
Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,
[While] we ourselves become his clouds of witness
and sing the waning darkness into light,
His light in us, and ours in him concealed,
Which all creation waits to see revealed."

This Pride month of June, and this June 21 National Indigenous Peoples Day, we celebrate 2SLGBTQIA+ history, resilience, and diversity as well as that of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis across Canada. I want to share a short clip of a non-gendered advocate for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights.

Alok Vaid-Menon. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/D1kTxqqkHMA>

Can we live into our authentic selves as Alok challenges? Today, many of us will finish the study of *Winipêk*, a book of short articles and photographs by Nigaan Sinclair which delves deep into the heritage and inclusivity of Indigenous peoples. To read it and discuss it and question it is to be in transition, to let go of a divisive mentality I was raised with. The generosity of Indigenous peoples has been one of welcome. Canada is Indigenous territory. With Ascension, a time of transition, we are invited to shift out of old ways of being into the reality of the here and now and what is to come.

Questions: How are today's readings speaking to you? What is a transition you've experienced? What is so life-giving for you that you can witness to it?