

## **“Never Forgotten, Never Forsaken”**

Rev. David Gregory

May 24, 2020

Easter 7



*The Ascension*  
Giotto di Bondone

### **First reading**

#### *A Blessing for Presence*

by John O’Donohue, in *To Bless the Space Between Us*

Awaken to the mystery of being here  
and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.  
Have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.  
Receive encouragement when new frontiers beckon.  
Respond to the call of your gift and the courage to follow its path.  
Let the flame of anger free you of all falsity.  
May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame.  
May anxiety never linger about you.  
May your outer dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul.  
Take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention.  
Be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul.  
May you experience each day as a sacred gift  
woven around the heart of wonder.

### **Second reading**

*Matthew 28:20 – New Revised Standard Version*

Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

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I would like you to know that no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, or even where you are on this planet, you are welcome to make our community your spiritual home. In addition to our weekly video, we are hosting a number of regular gatherings, including discussion and prayer times, a brief weekly communion service, and a variety of contemplative practices, yoga programs, and social justice actions, all by way of Zoom conferencing. If you would like to receive invitations to our online offerings, all you need to do is visit [cctibur.org](http://cctibur.org) and subscribe to our email list. You’ll easily find the link to do that on our home page.

I know that we are in a national conversation about the resumption of in-person worship services, and we'd like you to know that we will not be in any rush to resume in-person worship. There are still far too many questions about the coronavirus, a vaccine is too far off, and our population is too much at risk to move forward just yet. Love of neighbor requires an abundance of caution. There are no impediments to our religious liberty, and we are exercising our freedom to create community in every way we can. Our prayers on Zoom are every bit as effective as the ones we say together in a physical room. Our online community is growing, so for now, we're doing just fine. We just wanted you to know that. So, back to the business at hand.

For those who follow the rhythm of the evolving Jesus story, today is the last Sunday before Pentecost. Sometimes we call it Ascension Sunday, the day that we pause to consider the parting words of a resurrected Jesus, who then moves from this earthly scene to make way for our new permanent Friend of Whom we spoke last week. As with every big event in the Christian calendar, there is preparation involved. Before the nativity we have Advent. Before the resurrection we have the Lenten Season. And before Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit—we have the Easter Season. So let's allow ourselves a bit of simple logic as we approach Pentecost this time around. When we speak of the entrance of the Holy Spirit into our human experience, this is not to imply that this God energy was somehow missing before that. Even the ancient Hebrews spoke of the "Spirit of God moving over the waters." There has never been a place or a time when Divine Presence has been absent. But the idea of a Messiah going away and sending in the Replacement simply gives us an opportunity to highlight our understanding of this Holy One, and to achieve a bit more focus on its qualities and attributes. Wherever there is breath and beating hearts, this Spirit is present. There would be nothing we call life without it. But it is in the telling of this part of the story, of the Holy Spirit showing up in ways that could be seen and heard and smelled and tasted and touched, that makes any argument against its existence moot.

The late Celtic poet and author John O'Donohue in his *Blessing for Presence*, invites us into this very sensate version of the Beloved One. He calls it the immensity of our own presence, and asks us to find it joyfully in the "temple of our senses." This invitation hearkens to none other than the Apostle Paul, who speaks of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual practices which honored earth and body and the divine feminine were the subjects of many early Christian writings. But as the church gradually married itself to the empire during the third and fourth centuries, those ideas were suppressed, and Christianity became primarily a religion for the neck up. The Holy Spirit was allowed in only as a theological proposition. The so-called Third Person of the Trinity was spoken of in intellectual rather than experiential terms. It's taken us a couple thousand years, then, to begin to taste the beauty and power of this divine energy in an embodied way, and it's creating an entirely new reformation of the way we know and experience God. And we get to be here in the birthing of this new era.

I cannot think of a more exciting time to be alive than in this crazy, pivotal moment where history is being made every day and creative energies are flowing like the River Euphrates—flowing through Eden and watering all the beauty of divine creation. From somewhere deep within my religious past comes a thought that has always been hard to shake, i.e., that feelings or emotions are not to be trusted and that sensations are to be surrendered at the altar of propositional truth. There was a *fact*, you see, and that usually meant that something that the Bible said was *so*. And then you placed your faith in that fact, sometimes rather blindly, and then if you had any feelings or sensations about it, they would have to

surrender to the primacy of fact. Fact, then Faith, then Feeling. The problem with that way of thinking is that our senses rarely lie to us. They have no agenda like some theologians or politicians do; hence the pressure to tell us that the things we are seeing before our very eyes are simply not so. In answer to that, O'Donohue would say to us, "Let the flame of anger free you of all falsity."

It may have fallen out of vogue for journalists to question ideas that defy reality. But our own anger is what can awaken us to the children that we see in cages, the guns that are present in the taunts of white supremacists, or the obvious attempts at voter suppression that happen every day. We can see. We can hear. And we can touch. Divine Presence, you see, is more than just a gut feeling; it is a warmth of heart that keeps it all aflame. It is that which drives the anxiety away, keeps us noticing what we're noticing, and gives us the sense of the world that is coming into focus, the just and loving and truthful world that we are co-creating. So the Pentecost that is to come will remind us of our power. It will highlight the presence of the One who guides us to what is true. It will comfort us in our fearful moments, love us in our angry ones, and be the Renewable Energy that we so desperately need in order to keep moving forward.

For all spiritual traditions, for all religious institutions, all health and service organizations, for singles and couples and families of every kind, these are some of the most trying times we've faced in many generations. But this New Friend who is coming our way, the One who's been here all along, will never leave us without a way forward. It is our desire to shine a light on that pathway, and to invite you to sigh with relief as you come along.



*Your Word is a Lamp to my Feet and a Light for my Path*  
Ain Vares