This coming Thursday marks the 40th days after Easter. On the church calendar, it is known as the Day of Ascension – a day when the risen Christ returns back to be with his Father. This also marked a new chapter for the early disciples just as they thought they had Jesus back, now they were about to lose him again for the 2nd time. But this time Jesus left them a promise that upon his return once again and that someone else was going to come in his place. God would never leave the people to be alone.

**As you know, the number 40 bears great significance throughout the Bible. It represents a period of trail and uncertainty, as well as a testing of faith and deliverance**. The liberated Israelites were wandering out in the wilderness for more than 40 years. In the same way, Jesus was tempted by Satan out in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, and Noah also spent 40 days inside the ark after the great flood that destroyed much of the world, except those who were righteous. God hit the reset button and was willing to give humanity a second chance.

 During these past 40 days of Easter, **God has also put us on a trial to test our patience and our discernment of faith. Has our euphoria of Easter been faded away and our spiritual high crashed back down to earth so quickly? Afterall we are still in the season of Easter.**

In the 1st Easter, the risen Christ was making His presence known by appearing and witnessing to many disciples and followers. While some had the privilege of seeing Him in person, and even breaking bread together with him, some didn’t.

Many of these followers didn’t believe what they saw at first, but eventually they remembered what Jesus had promised them while he was still with them and that things were just happening according to what God had planned. What was also God’s plan was that the risen Christ must depart from them and a special counsel – the Holy Spirit would be sent upon the people. This fulfilled what God had promised to the people that he will never let go of His own people.

During these 40 days Jesus also made clear to His followers NOT to hold on to Him, because this present world was not where He ultimately belongs. It is also not ours either. Our earthly presence was only a temporary shelter. Our eternal home and dwelling place rests in heaven and with our heavenly Father. As Jesus said, “***In a little while the world will no longer see me****,* ***but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.****”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

*“****I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you. The Father will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.****”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

 Upon his departure, Jesus assured us that God will not forsake us. The arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost signified that the disciples shall not be dependent upon Jesus’s physically presence here…but instead, Jesus lives IN our lives through the presence of the Holy Spirit. **Theologically this marked a major shift of our faith journey - from a physical and tangible presence of our faith to a metaphysical and spiritual one. God is still actively living among us in spirit, even though we cannot see or touch him physically.**

 I believe it was a good thing that God has set it up this way that Jesus must leave his disciples and followers. If Jesus had stayed, the people would easily fall back upon their complacency by sitting back and letting Jesus do all the work, instead of them. That’s not what God had in mind when he commissioned them to carry out God’s work ot the end of the earth. **The Holy Spirit** **gave us the ability and empowered us with the gift of witness and to share these gifts of faith through the resurrected Christ.**

 As we read earlier in Peter’s letter to the early church, we were reminded that, when it comes to sharing our faith, we must **always be ready** and be willing to share our stories and experiences to others in unexpected ways. The Holy Spirit equips us and provides us with opportunities to articulate our faith and to do things that are beyond our imagination, just as it did with the early disciples. The disciples had as much fears and doubts just as we do today. But somehow they were able to overcome their personal doubt and turned their doubts into faith once again.

 ***Always be ready*** *to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

 It is true that sharing our faith today can be quite a daunting experience, but it is also a rewarding one. We must be willing to take some risks in order to overcome our fear of rejection from others. God will give us grace to speak and act with gentleness and reverence. **God CAN and WILL use us as His instrument of grace through the works of our hands and where our feet may guide us to next.**

 Our Reformed understanding reminds us that **salvation ultimately does not depend upon our own doings, but upon the sovereignty and the grace of our God. God has given humanity ample opportunities to believe, yet some still turn away and reject God. Even still those who have rejected God in the past are still given the grace necessary to turn their faith and ultimately their lives around.**

A friend of mine recently shared with me about his own personal faith journey. He is currently going through the ordination process as a candidate under care within the Presbyterian Church. He has completed his seminary studies and also his field education placement at a parish setting. He is a 1.5 generation Korean-American who came to this country when he was a teenager while his parents stayed in Korea.

By the grace of God, he was introduced to the Christian faith at a local church through his friends, even though he was NOT brought up in a church at all while he was in Korea. Neither of his parents were Christians also. Even though both of his parents considered themselves as Buddhist, they were not even practicing Buddhist either. So while he was studying here in America, my friend came to know Christ and was baptized in his teenage years without even letting his parents know because he feared that they would reject or even disown him as their son. It was only a few years later, when he finally told his parents about his newfound faith in Christ.

Throughout his faith journey, my friend prayed to God that someday his parents would not only accept his own faith calling as a Christian but to go into ministry serving the church. Furthermore, he prayed for his parents that they too would someday accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. When my friend told his parents that he would give up his career in business and pursue his seminary study to be a pastor, he prayed to God and he would have the courage to let his parents know without their rejection, fearing that they might disown him and bring shame and disgrace to the family. He was all prepared for that worst-case scenario.

To his amazement, not only did his parents not reject him for forgoing his career in business and going into full-time ministry, they even gave him their blessings as well to do whatever he felt was the best for him. To make the long story short, both of his parents were also baptized a few years later when the whole family was reunited here in the US.

This was just one of many countless miracles of how the Holy Spirit has inspired and convict the hearts of those who even rejected God. Chances are we all have our own faith miracle stories similar to that. Perhaps we are byproducts of such miracles as well. Sometimes the hardest people to witness and to share our faith with are the closest ones we know. I’m sure we all have friends, family members, and relatives who are not-yet believers. But God never give up on them and certainly never give up on what God may do as the Holy Spirit works signs of miracles in our lives.

As the Apostle Paul wrote to the early church in Rome, *“****Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"[[4]](#footnote-4)***

 Friends, through the power of the Holy Spirit, God has called us to be proclaimers of His work, to be his beautiful hands and feet that bring the good news to others. We need to be sent out into our neighborhood, in order to proclaim Christ’s work. We need to proclaim how God has transformed our lives, so that others may hear our stories of faith. And as they hear our stories, we pray that their hearts may one day be convicted and believed in the saving grace and power of our risen Christ.

***Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.******[[5]](#footnote-5) “Let our speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that we may know how we ought to answer everyone.”[[6]](#footnote-6)***

Let us pray that God will open doors of opportunity for us, so that we can more faithful witness to all those around us, by sharing not only our resources but our lives and our love for others. The Holy Spirit will empower us and teach us what to say and what we shall do. Remember that **salvation is not to be granted by us but only through Christ and with the power of the Holy Spirit.** As the Apostle Paul reminded us,*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; but it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast.[[7]](#footnote-7)*

Always be ready to share our hope and our faith story of how God has worked in our lives. Ready, Set…and “GO!” Go where? *“Go into the world and proclaim the good news to all of God’s people and the whole of God’s creation.”* In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *John 14:19* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *John 14:18, 16* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *1 Peter 3:15-16* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Romans 10:13-15* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *I Peter 3:15-16* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Colossians 4:6* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Ephesians 2:8-9* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)