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“It is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you”  
(John 16:9).

*Acts 16:23-34; John 16:5-11*

Jesus’ departure completed his human sojourn in history, the limited experience all of us will have in this world. Death is part of the human condition, and Jesus of Nazareth was like us in all things in embracing that condition. But the mystery begins here. Because Jesus is the Christ, death could not silence or exclude him from history, and in his risen life He is now timeless, present and active within his followers, the church. But this requires that we accept the torch he is passing to us. There is no Plan B.

In the Farewell Discourses, Jesus tells his disciples that his new presence with them through the Advocate cannot begin until he departs. They want him to stay as he is, the Jesus they have known as their master and teacher. They are grief-stricken at the thought of life without him. They are totally dependent on him as their leader. Yet, this is precisely the transition they, as his followers, must accept for their own mission to begin. He has prepared them and promised to empower them by his Spirit to continue his ministry in the world.

We feel their anxiety as they huddle in the upper room, or their hesitation at the Ascension when they stand looking up the sky. They lack confidence as they return to Jerusalem to pray for the Spirit. They have yet to understand that Jesus has gone ahead of them into the world, and after the Spirit comes at Pentecost, they will experience his power as they carry out his mission. But none of this will happen

unless Jesus departs.

In the same sense, this is our dilemma. Do we trust that Jesus is in the world through us? Do we dare to be other Christs? Or would we rather enshrine him, pray to him, stand looking up to heaven for his return, than do what he commanded us, which is to take up his mission to announce God's Good News, to show his compassion for others, to dare to speak the truth to power and to live his example of mercy and reconciliation in a divided and fearful world?

Our celebration of Easter leads us forward to the Ascension and then to Pentecost. We are now the followers of Jesus in the world. We are his human hands and feet, his face and his voice announcing the Gospel to the poor, setting captives free, giving sight to the blind, lifting burdens from the oppressed. But we know our inadequacy to extend his mission. So, like the first disciples, we are called to fast and pray and to offer our weakness and our emptiness to be filled by the Holy Spirit. Everything has led us to this crucial moment of transfer and trust. If we ask for the promised Advocate, when God calls, as every prophet before us has done, we are to say, "Here I am."

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