

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Seventh Sunday of Easter (A)

Acts 1.6-14

Psalm 68.1-10, 33-36

1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11

John 17.1-11

From Easter through Pentecost the Old Testament lesson is replaced by a lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. The readings from Acts focus on the birth of the Church in Jerusalem (reporting, *e.g.*, the sermons of Peter and Stephen). The Gospel readings are generally from John.

**Acts 1.6-14**

1. Luke opens Acts (vol. 2 to the Gospel of Luke) making clear that he now shifts his focus from the life of Jesus to the life of the Church. In the verses included in this lesson we find the verse which lays out the “program” for all of Acts.
  - a. In v. 8, Jesus tells the disciples that they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem and all of Judea.
    - i. Peter and Stephen are witnesses.
  - b. Jesus says that they will witness in Samaria. Philip does so.
  - c. Jesus says that the witness will continue to the “end of the earth”. Paul takes the Good News throughout Asia and Greece, and to Rome, the center of the world.
2. Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, predicting the Pentecost. Having promised the Holy Spirit, He is lifted up into heaven. The Spirit will grant *power* to the Church.
  - a. Luke echoes the description of the ascent of Elijah to heaven, found at 2 Kgs. 2.9-13.
3. Jesus ascends from the Mount of Olives. This *appears* to be a different location from that described at Luke 24.50 (Bethany), but the geography is in fact contiguous and interchangeable.
  - a. Jerusalem remains the focus of the paschal event, for this location is a “Sabbath’s journey” (*i.e.*, only about ½ mile from the city wall).
4. The Eleven disciples are reintroduced (having been named in Luke), but now as part of a larger community, with explicit reference to “certain women,” the Virgin Mary, and Jesus’ brothers.

**Psalm 68.1-10, 33-36**

1. This psalm is considered by most scholars to be the most obscure and difficult in all of the psalter.
  - a. The selected verses do, however, describe the active agency of God in vindicating righteousness.
    - i. V. 1 was used, therefore, as an invocation of divine aid. *E.g.*, this verse was inscribed on crosses issued to imperial army officers under the reign of the Tsars in Russia.

2. The reference in v. 2 to God's enemies vanishing like smoke echoes the motif found at Num. 10.35, referring to the movement of the Ark of the Covenant.
  - a. At the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* this is depicted in film, when the Nazis vanish like smoke upon opening the ark.
3. Vv. 7-8 describe a "theophany," an appearance of God. The description closely parallels that found at Judg. 5.4-5.
4. The v. 18 reference to ascent, and to leading "captivity captive" refers both to the ascent of the LORD's ark onto Mt. Zion (hence the description in v. 16 to another mountain being envious), and to the Harrowing of Hell, in which Jesus (between Good Friday and Easter Sunday) descended into Hell (as confessed in the Creed), to free the righteous from death.

### **1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11**

1. Throughout this letter Peter has emphasized preparation for persecution. Now he emphasizes the reality of persecution. The "fiery ordeal" referenced in v. 12 refers to the persecution under Nero (*ca. A.D. 64-66*), in which Peter himself was killed.
  - a. Nonetheless, the fact that Peter says that believers should "not be surprised" by persecution indicates that the letter anticipates the Neronian persecution, the first persecution by the state.
2. At 2.21 Peter enjoined an imitation of Christ's suffering. Now he teaches that those who are persecuted for Jesus' Name share in His sufferings.
3. The present sufferings begin the end of time. When Christians suffer this indicates that in God's plan the resolution of all Creation is to take place.
  - a. This type of teaching has caused people throughout history to expect judgment day as imminent. It may be, but the fact remains that eternity is outside of time, and trying to predict judgment at any time is not a fruitful exercise.
    - i. We are called to live at all times as if judgment is in fact imminent.
4. We are to be disciplined, for in the absence of discipline we become easier prey for evil. When Peter refers to the devil prowling, he means this literally!

### **John 17.1-11**

1. Ch. 17 comprises Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer," in which He intercedes for believers. The "Lord's Prayer" is, properly, a model prayer for disciples to follow.
  - a. Jesus returns to His glory (17.1-5) and sends His disciples into the world (17.6-19), praying that they may be one (17.20-26).
2. This lesson is taken from Jesus' prayer for the disciples. Parallels can be noted with the Lord's Prayer:
  - a. The fact that God is addressed as "Father";
  - b. God is glorified and the Holy Name is invoked;
  - c. Doing the work of God is emphasized;
  - d. Jesus petitions that the disciples may be delivered from the "evil one" (in v. 15).

3. Throughout the gospel Jesus has said that His hour “is not yet come”. Now He says that it has!
  - a. He is glorified because He has completed the work of the Father.
  - b. He is glorified on the cross, saying “It is finished (“accomplished”)[the work].
  - c. He invokes the Father, that the Father may glorify Him, referring to His (Jesus’) glory before the world was created. This harks back to the beginning of the Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word ...”
4. In this glory, Jesus sends His disciples into the world, invoking the Father’s protection of those who serve.