

Read [Acts 1:6-14](#).

Loss, Grief, and Faith

Let's put ourselves in the disciples' shoes for a moment and think about what has brought them to where they are in Acts 1.

The gospels tell the story of twelve very different people brought together by Jesus to live in God's ways together. They become closer than family, watching Jesus turn water into wine, heal the sick, feed the crowds, teach with wisdom, and speak truth to power. After a time, through faith, the disciples begin to do these things themselves in Jesus' name. They cast out demons, bring sight to the blind, raise the dead, eat with sinners and tax collectors. With Jesus, they begin to see the world made new.

Until Jesus is arrested, tried, and executed—gone. Even Jesus' body disappears from its tomb. The disciples leave Jerusalem, thinking that their glorious dream of the reign of God was over.

Then—miracle of miracles—Jesus comes back! Alive in a new way. The same but different. And once again they all walk together, eat together, and together they again imagine the world transformed by God's love and peace. Jesus' crucifixion must have seemed like a nightmare from which they'd finally awakened.

Then, just at this point of renewed hope, Jesus leaves. Again. He simply lets go and disappears into the clouds. All the disciples can do is stand there and watch him go.

I think I can feel an echo of what they felt. As we've been struggling together to be Church—in worship, service, and community—over the past 11 pandemic-filled weeks, we've had our own moments (or days, if we're honest) of standing around, wide-eyed and uncomprehending, not sure what's happening and what we should do next.

And now that planning has begun for the time when we can gather beyond our own households again, we're still doing some standing around, looking at each other. What is the safest way to move forward? When will we know the time is right? What should we start first? Our fear of missing out—"Look what *that* church has been doing!"—is being weighed against our deep care for our beloved family of faith.

We know, thanks to guidelines provided by our UCC leadership, that when communal worship returns it will be in a new way for some time. There will be no singing as this disperses droplets over much greater distances. There will be no passing

the offering plate or the communion trays from hand to hand. There will be no choir and no coffee hour. We know that there *will* be hand sanitizer, deep cleaning, wearing masks, and physical distancing in the sanctuary. The Londesborough UC Board has appointed an Emergency Preparedness Committee to lead the process.

Still, wouldn't it be great if Jesus could just come back—again—and show us—again—what being alive in a new way means for us now? This is hard change, full of loss and grief. It would make a difference to feel his presence with us in this.

The first disciples faced loss and grief with faith when Jesus ascended to God and, as they did, they found new life. They became the living Body of Christ. Acts tells their unprecedented, inspiring, adventurous story in 28 chapters, but it begins in Chapter 1, with a small but significant first step. They prayed.

They united their hearts and hopes, and prayed that the God of New Life would be with them, whatever happened next. And then they got started.

So, friends, in this present moment when we seem to be standing, looking at the place where our old way of being church used to be, let's at least stand as a community of faith, passionately united in prayer. Will you **pray for our congregational leaders**, that they'll gather reliable advice to make informed, compassionate decisions? Will you **pray for our church members**, that they'll pour out their gifts and abilities generously to help create the new shapes that our worship and fellowship must take? Will you **pray for our wider community**, that they'll welcome our new ways of being a community of faith with curiosity and a fresh willingness to try church again?

The months to come will tell our story. It won't be perfect. We will undoubtedly make mistakes and I can predict with 100% accuracy that we won't make everybody happy. But in faith, we will write a chapter in the life of our churches unlike any other in their history. The Risen Christ continues to break into the world in new and surprising ways, and our shared life as resurrection people can embody God's inclusive, expansive, self-giving love in a new way for this new time.

Before we get started, though, let's first stand together in prayer and hold fast to the faith our *New Creed* proclaims: "We believe in God: who has created and is creating...God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God."

Amen.