

## Down to the Nitty-Gritty

[Text - Acts 1:6-14]

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When we look at the life of Jesus, we see a person who is firmly grounded in the present moment. Time and again he declares, “The Realm of God is at hand! It is among you; it is within you! It is here, it is now!” For Jesus, the Divine Realm isn’t some distant destination to hope for; it’s a present Reality to work and to live for - something that can be experienced, embraced, and celebrated throughout one’s entire life. So, to paraphrase those two figures in white robes, “Followers of Jesus, why are you standing-around looking up at the sky? It’s time to get down-to-earth and get involved with the people, places, and situations where Christ’s Living, Loving Presence can still make a real and lasting difference!”

Right before “a cloud takes him out of their sight” Jesus gives his followers some excellent advice on how to carry-forward the *Gospel* message - the *Good News* of Divine Love and Grace. And while this advice may sound fairly simple, *following* it can actually be quite challenging! Jesus tells his disciples that in order to share the Divine Love that they have experienced, they must begin right where they are. For them, *Jerusalem* is that place. Of course for them, Jerusalem isn’t a particularly hospitable place. That’s where their leader was arrested, condemned, and killed just a few weeks earlier. And if these disciples have any reputation around Jerusalem, they are known as followers of a dead Messiah - One who apparently had failed in his mission, and who they had failed in his time of greatest need.

It seems highly unlikely that the disciples would have chosen Jerusalem as the place to begin their work. Yet that’s precisely where Jesus tells them to start: Right where they are - in the

midst of some truly difficult problems and obstacles; *and* some truly tremendous possibilities and opportunities. Or, as Jesus might say to you and me today, “Share the Good News of Divine love and grace, *beginning* in your own homes and families! Share this wonderful message with all of your neighbors and friends!” “Seriously Jesus? Have you met my family? Do you know unpleasant and exasperating my neighbor can be? Can’t I start someplace easier - like maybe North Korea?”

Apparently, even though our message and mission can extend far beyond our immediate community - perhaps even “to the ends of the earth” - it needs to begin right here and now; because it receives its *authenticity* in our down-to-earth, day-to-day living. When you and I share the Good News of Divine Love within our own homes and communities, we see and experience the real strengths - and challenges - of our Faith. That’s because it’s close to home where people see and experience the real *us*! They observe our strengths *and* our weaknesses; they see first-hand how our connection to Christ, and to Christ’s Church, actually impacts the way we live and interact. Genuine Christianity is about how you and I fill our every day, deal with difficult people, express our compassion, show our generosity, and faithfully follow-through on our commitments,

Jesus knows his disciples pretty well; and he also has a pretty good understanding of human nature. He realizes that if his message of love and grace, forgiveness and peace is to take-off and soar, it will need to be practiced and proven in the crucible of Life’s nitty-gritty circumstances. He understands that if you and I truly love our Heavenly Parent, then we will practice Divine Compassion and Graciousness right here on earth among all our sisters and brothers. Having said that, I must confess that when it comes to practicing what I [literally] preach, my extended family is often my greatest challenge.

For years, there's been this weird ebb-and-flow of rejection, then semi-acceptance; warming-up, then cooling-down from several members of my large - and largely fundamentalist - family. Some of them are quite conflicted when it comes to actually accepting me as an openly gay person of Faith; and sometimes this back-and-forth process gets so tiresome that I consider giving-up on them. Of course, it's precisely in those times that my being a person of Faith helps me renew my resolve not to do so. I rededicate myself to the simple "Spiritual Solution" to which I committed years ago: I will not close the door, or my heart, to any of my family; I will love them, and I'll leave it up to God to change them. [Actually, that's been my basic "Spiritual" Solution" for dealing with difficult people for most of my life!]

I'll admit, the results have been mixed. I've seen some truly amazing transformations of seemingly irreconcilable relationships. I've also experienced some discouraging disappointments and repetitive resistance. But, hey, nothing's perfect in this world - certainly not me, or my ability to consistently convey the love. Yet even if those family members never change their attitude, I believe that this approach changes me for the better. And it's certainly far more freeing and fulfilling than trying to control things that are simply beyond my control!

The story of Christ's ascension reminds us that it's important for you and me to raise our sights to the heavens - to envision a perfectly glorious Divine Realm. Yet it's also important that we stay grounded upon this earth. Because for now, this is where we live; this is where we love. And it is in our everyday world that Jesus Christ still rises-up to encounter, inspire, and empower us - in our homes and our communities, among our noisy or nosey neighbors, and even among our rigidly religious relatives! Before he departs from his disciples, Jesus promises them - and us - "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses!" What better place to start than

right where we are? To extend to others the same Divine compassion, welcome and grace that we ourselves experience every day!