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The Rt. Rev. Kathryn "Kai" Ryan (5/21/2023, Seventh Sunday after Easter)

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In the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen. Please be seated. One thing I always know when I come to St. Albans is I gotta follow him. Thought about borrowing the helmet I thought maybe he was going to talk about, you know, Jesus is sending in heaven and needing, you know, a space suit. But I don't know. Some stories have more than one way of telling. My dad and his brothers always told us about the April Fool's jokes, they would play on my grandfather, because His birthday was April 1. And they usually involve some joke about going to the house in saying the horses had escaped. And then their dad would run down to the corral and, and the horses would be there safe. Except that when my grandfather told the story, he said that they, they came and told them, the horses had escaped, and he went down there and they were waiting, say April Fool's. But they had left the gate open. And so the joke was on them, and they had to, like pursue a horse almost all the way from Santa Fe to Taos before they could get it back. Today, we hear the story of the ascension of Jesus from the book of the Acts of the Apostles. And that story is told twice in the New Testament. First at the end of the Gospel of Luke to cap off the story of Jesus's ministry on earth after his resurrection. And then same author, same pen, you might say, tells the story again at the beginning of the acts. Now in the account in the final chapter of Luke's Gospel, Jesus meets his disciples in Jerusalem following the resurrection. He Commission's them as his witnesses, and tells them to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit. That's what we'll celebrate next week, the gift of the Spirit. And then Jesus led them out. Luke writes to Bethany and while they watched Jesus was drawn up into heaven. And the disciples the Gospel says, filled with joy worshiped Jesus returned to Jerusalem, and we're continually in the temple blessing God. That is, the apostles were doing just what the Lord had instructed them to do, waiting for the Holy Spirit, worshiping God. Now when we turn to Luke's first chapter, and the Acts of the Apostles, as we did this morning, we find Jesus's ascension

retold, and much of it is is exactly the same tells the same details. It's the same story. Once again, Jesus meets with his disciples after His resurrection, He assures them they will receive power from on high when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. He Commission's them as his witnesses, that is those who will go out and tell the story and live that life to the ends of the earth. And then he is lifted up out of their sight. But the author adds a curious detail he didn't think to include when he was writing about the end of Jesus's earthly ministry. He writes that the witnesses to Jesus's ascension stood in their spots transfixed eyes gazing up where Jesus had just gone toward heaven. They must have looked as if they were going to develop Crick's in their neck or something. Because suddenly there were these two guys dressed in white and asked and they asked them whenever you hear two men dressed in white or two figures dressed in white, you know what that means, right? Usually, they say what? They're the Bee Gees, yes, exactly. Yes, 1970s or 80s band unless they're in Switzerland or Sweden and then they can be from the 2000s Right. You know, as messengers, angels and so they say that they see the the apostle standing there gazing toward heaven transfixed and say, Why do you stand there gazing into heaven? Why do you stand there? Why do we stand there they tell Jesus's friends that he will return in the same way he is departed. And so with this added detail, the story of Jesus's ascent moves from concluding the story of Jesus's ministry, to opening the story of Jesus's church. Staring up into the sky, is not the life for which Jesus commissioned us. The men clad and white shifted the disciples gaze earthward, to the life around them to get on with the work of witnessing. There's a reason the Church calls the second volume of Luke's writings, the Acts of the Apostles. Yet as Luke writes in the gospel, they were constantly in the temple blessing God, and an axe they were continually devoting themselves to prayer. In other words, though, the apostles eyes were drawn back down to earth to see the world around them, they were they were supposed to go witness, they didn't lose that connection. That sense of connection with God, in heaven and all other places. Jesus's ascension set off a mission of earthly service, fueled by a heaven word, vision. But as I wander about the diocese and out around the world, and I talked to people and see what we focus on, and think about my own life, what I realize is that most of us would, wouldn't be caught staring into heaven. Looking Earth word comes a lot more naturally. The painful stuff of life particularly commands our attention. The band Green Day, not in the 1970s Aaron the band Green Day captured that mood that that sort of focus on the painful stuff of life. When they saying we live in troubled times. We live in troubled times they saying, What good is love and peace on earth, when it's exclusive? Where's the truth and the written word? If no one reads it? They go on the world stops turning, Paradise burning. So don't take don't think twice. We live in troubled times. Billy Joel Armstrong, Billy Joe Armstrong, easy for you to say. Billy Joe Armstrong, leader, lead singer for Green Day, wrote those lyrics following the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris that left 130 people dead and more than 400 wounded. That was a terrible

day for those in France. And and honestly for those around the world who had loved ones in Paris, and for those who just love the peace of civil society. Nearly every day, events minor and major could evoke those same lyrics, couldn't they? From musicians, artists, politicians, spiritual leaders, and the rest of us, there's plenty around us to get us to say those words. We live in troubled times. We watch endless news cycles to confirm what we already know. We cannot turn away we can't break our focus on the earth, and all that it's people suffer. For our safety, and for our dread curiosity, we cast our gaze around us yet also, also for our service, right? Me for our service as Christians. We live in troubled times as the call of the Christian disciple to our faith practice as Episcopal Christians often focuses on this divinely tinged earthly life. In a few minutes, we're going to renew our baptismal covenant. And when we do that we'll commit will assent to five promises. The baptized that's those of us who are bad baptized, those of us who will be confirmed everybody we commit to continuing the apostles teaching, resist evil. And when that fails, repent, proclaim good news. Seek and serve all people strive for justice and respect every person's dignity. It sounds like we're to be the answer to set things. Right? Right, this earthly work that we're called to do as Christians is to pursue justice, to seek dignity, to seek and serve Christ and all persons loving our neighbor as ourselves. Because there's a lot of people out there who don't think they're loved at all right. Now, activities were asked to embrace and embody, require our immersion in the messiness of life. Each one of the promises, responds to the frailty and sometimes darkness that characterizes so much of the present moment. Our faith that is, does not imagine our escape from all that troubles God's creation and God's people, but invites us to lean in, to step in to dive in to join Jesus and the transformation that God has set in motion. God yearns for each person, for each of you, for me, for all of us to join in turning trouble, into redemption. And yet, there is a danger here. Sometimes a characteristically Episcopal danger, I think, we answer the questions, I will with God's help. But we act like we stopped listening after I will. We act as if it's all up to us. We will as the church things are bad, we must do something, we will do something right. We act as if it's all up to us. Looking so intently at the challenges of this life these troubled times, we keep our eyes cast down. The story of the ascension reminds us to look heavenward to look to the one from whom help comes. Jesus ascended, dwells with God powerful to aid us in our time of need. Jesus promises and delivers as God and and the sun send forth the spirit to strengthen, to encourage to support us to remind us that we are saved not by our own efforts, but by the gift of Jesus. That we are redeemed and the world is are deemed, not because of our plans and efforts but because God loved the world and intends that Jesus's ascension set off a mission of earthly service fueled by a heaven word, vision, and no we are not to stand still and stare into the heavens. We are not to forget that the heavens are there, and that Christ who went into the heavens with God who ascended, who was raised from the dead, that Christ Himself is our

companion, and is the master and redeemer of all things. And so, let that heaven word vision be ours today. Let God's people be glad and rejoice. Sing praises to God's name my friends. Rejoice before him. For Christ as ascended into heaven, so that he might ever be present with you. In the name of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.