

**WAX ON, WAX OFF**  
**John 14:1-14**  
**Preached by Dr. Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
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Four Sundays after Easter morning we find ourselves being taken back again to the Upper Room, on the eve of Good Friday, where Jesus gave his last minute assurances and instructions given before everything changed forever.

Before we consider what Jesus said that night I'd first like to say something about what it was like being a disciple of a Jewish rabbi two thousand years ago (because knowing this information will help us make more sense out of what Jesus said that night to prepare them for his departure).

Two thousand years ago rabbis or scholarly holy men, spent their lives searching the scriptures for ultimate truth. Those with wise and loving reputations were always sought after by young men wanting to pursue the scholarly life based on the scriptures. Back then all boys were expected to learn to read and study the Torah, but only a few of them would continue their learning after most of the other boys stopped. When these few came of age, they'd approach the rabbi of their choice and ask to be admitted to his school and become one of his students or disciples.

Once a candidate was accepted by his new rabbi it was expected he would mold his life after his rabbi as much as possible. The disciple would actually mimic his behaviors, the way he walked and talked, the way he ate his food, even the way he treated his wife and children. In other words the disciple would try to become a mirror reflection of his teacher.

So being the disciple was more than just learning from him it was really all about becoming like him, you might even say the disciple's aim was to become his rabbi's clone.

Put this explanation on the back burner for now and we'll get back to it later.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God believe also in me." Jesus' disciples had to know by now that something was about to happen that would change their lives forever. Earlier he spoke about his imminent death, "The light is with you a little longer," he said.

That's why Jesus told them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe in me."

Remember what I just said about a disciple joining himself to his rabbi by the hip. The disciples' identity and lifestyle became extensions of the rabbi's personality. And if

a rabbi suddenly disowned one of his disciples the effect would be devastating, his world would come crashing down, his life purpose would evaporate and he'd be left with nothing but crushed expectations.

You can see why it was necessary for Jesus to gather his disciples together one last time because when the inevitable happened the next day maybe they wouldn't be totally prepared for his death but at least they wouldn't be completely caught off guard.

I think most of the things John reports Jesus telling his disciples that night probably went right over their heads. It was too much information to digest in one sitting.

Something to think about, those forty days between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension or return back up to heaven had to be a roller coaster ride for the disciples. He unexpectedly popped up in the Garden on Easter morning and the Upper Room later that evening, then there was that time on the beach, there one minute and then "puff" he vanished into thin air the next. They never knew when he'd show up and never knew when he'd leave. There was no official schedule printed out, no appointed time and place ("I'll see you Thursday at 6 PM.).

Instead the Risen Christ came and went whether the disciples were ready or not. Maddening right? Maybe even a little insensitive? I mean how can you plan your day if you never knew when Jesus would show up? Do you think at least one of the disciples struggled with separation anxiety or abandonment issues? So why didn't Jesus stay with the disciples every minute of every one of those forty days before he left for good?

Did you ever wonder about that? I think most of us think after the disciples saw Jesus was alive on Easter morning maybe even more alive than ever before everything would be honkey dorey. But could it be possible that soon after the initial adrenalin rush passed the disciples were still kind of lost in limbo? Remember they spent three years with Jesus, learning at his feet, observing close up, watching him show compassion to some and defiance to others, always on call, ready to sacrifice his time and energy for the sick and the lost. They were there watching when he preached and shed new light on the scriptures, they were with him, watching him twenty-four hours a day seven days a week make friends with tax collectors and prostitutes.

Why? They were his disciples, it was their job description to watch, listen and learn. That's all that was expected of them. Yes, once or twice Jesus sent them out, two by two on shake down cruises to teach and heal on their own, practice sessions you might call them. But when Jesus waded into the crowds to perform healings, or stood toe to toe with a bunch of Pharisees out for blood not once did Jesus even look at one of them and say, "Hey Peter, I'm kind of busy with these lepers, do you mind healing that blind guy over there and John, try to talk some sense into that scribe."

Never, not once did anything like that happen, the disciples only job was to hang out with Jesus with the expectation being the longer they stayed and watched him the

more they'd become like him. And, according to the Jewish rabbinical tradition, that's what discipleship was all about.

So again, why did Jesus leave them almost high and dry most of the time after Easter? Why didn't he stay with them constantly like he did before Good Friday? And why didn't Jesus let them get more involved in his ministry instead of keeping them constantly on the sidelines watching instead of participating those three years?

There's a good answer.

Maybe you remember the movie *The Karate Kid*. A teenager named Daniel asked a karate master named Mr. Miyagi to become his teacher.

Mr. Miyagi agreed but first he gave Daniel some seemingly menial tasks to do around his house, waxing his collection of cars, hand sanding a wooden walkway and painting his fence. Each task came with specific instructions on how to wax his car, sand his walkway and paint his fence that included specific body movements that included clockwise and counter clockwise hand movements and up and down hand motions. For instance when Daniel is told sand the floor, wax the car and paint he was supposed to do it the way Mr. Miyagi told him to do it. Well, after four days of doing these chores Daniel blew up, he thought he was being used as slave labor to clean up Mr. Miyagi's house. But when Mr. Miyagi ordered Daniel to perform the proscribed hand motions ("Wax on, wax off"), it immediately became clear to Daniel he was learning the basic defensive blocks of karate through muscle memory. He was learning karate without even realizing it.

And that's exactly what happened to the disciples, they were learning how to heal, teach and be prophetic without even realizing it. This is why Jesus did all the teaching, healing and truth telling all by himself. Maybe not by muscle memory but by just watching Jesus and later remembering Jesus they were ready to take over when the time came Jesus left them behind, but not alone, when he returned to heaven.

Which now brings us to the answer to the question, "After his resurrection, why did Jesus come and go, being there one minute and gone the next instead of staying with them every minute of those last forty days before he was taken up into heaven?"

I believe the answer can be found in the verse, "In my Father's house there are many rooms or dwelling places...and when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:1-2)

This scripture is often read at funerals so it's understandable many of us would think Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven, which he is, there are dwelling places in heaven waiting for us. But we put limitations of Jesus' promise if we believe he's only talking about when we go to heaven. Remember, eternal life doesn't begin when you die. Resurrection is all about living in the here and now so these dwelling places aren't just in heaven, they're already here on earth. Where are they?

Look in the mirror, look at the person sitting next to you in the pew, the one sitting across from you at the dinner table, the person who comes out of nowhere to help you when you feel helpless, the helpless person you help. Think about all the other members of the mystical Body of Christ, disciples who hanged with Jesus long enough to watch, listen and learn so they when needed can become their rabbi.

This is what Jesus wants from you, letting Christ live in you and through you so you can become, like Jesus, a living sacrifice, giving yourself away, lowering yourself to raise the other up, doing unto others as you would have them do it to you, not just when it's convenient but whenever Christ rises up in you, and me, unscheduled at a moment's notice bringing new life so you can be about the business of bringing Christ to your neighbor.

So, Jesus suddenly appeared and just as suddenly vanished so the disciples could learn how to become apostles, going from being students of their rabbi to becoming Ambassadors of Christ. During those forty days they had to get used to the new reality Christ would no longer be with them in the flesh, or would he? The miracle of the incarnation, God in the flesh didn't stop with Jesus, it continued in his disciples, it still continues in us.

If you are in Christ you are one of Jesus' dwelling places. If you are a disciple, your goal is to become just like Jesus. If you believe in the resurrection, you believe the Risen Christ is alive and living in all who bow down and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The question is, are you ready to put flesh on the Gospel and live like Jesus? How you answer that question will not only make the difference in your life, but the lives of those Christ, your Rabbi, has entrusted to your care.