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Seventh Sunday of Easter/The Ascension of Our Lord  
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## The Blessing of Goodbyes

I thought the *Long Minnesota Goodbye* was just a Sevig tradition, until I Google-d it this week. There are videos, articles and memes about saying goodbye in my home state. There is even a “Minnesota Good-bye cocktail.”

My experience with this tradition is at the lake home we share with Julie’s brothers. Whenever someone leaves, everyone who is present gathers at the driveway to say goodbye. We hug and say our goodbyes, then we linger and make sure they didn’t forget anything, and once the person or family is in the car and ready to back out we say, “Are you sure you can’t stay for another cup of coffee?” When the answer is no (and it’s always “no”) we wave and follow them as they back out of the driveway and head down the lake road, waving at them until we can no longer see the car. This is the *Long Minnesota Goodbye*.

It can be hard to say goodbye, whether it’s after a short visit from family or friends, or a goodbye that lasts a lifetime. I think about the goodbyes we experience each year when the seminarians are finished with their work/learning here and move on to the next ministry assignment. The goodbyes parents face when their kid goes off to college. The goodbyes when dear friends move across the country, or when someone retires from a well-loved career, or when a relationship ends. And of course I remember the many goodbyes I witnessed as a hospice chaplain, when a loved one was nearing the end of life and final goodbyes were spoken, or sometimes only experienced with deep heartache and longing.

The English word “Goodbye” is a shortened version of “God be with you.” So every time you say goodbye to someone you’re actually giving them a blessing in disguise: God be with you on your journey, God keep you safe, God hold you and keep you in whatever lies ahead. And the French and German phrases for goodbye, ‘au revoir’ and ‘auf Wiedersehen,’ mean ‘*til we see each other again*, which is kind of a happy and hopeful, “see you again soon.”

Each day, when I drop my daughter off at school she gives me both a blessing and a “see you again soon.” As she leaps out of the car she says, “Bye Mamma! Have a good day. I love you. I’m taking the bus home (or sometimes, pick me up at school).” In this daily ritual, she’s blessing me for the day ahead, and happily reminds me that we’ll see each other again soon. I love the rhythm of this simple and sweet daily ritual—Goodbye, I love you, I’ll see you again.

In the rhythm of the liturgical year, this is the season of saying goodbye. For some time now we’ve been watching Jesus prepare his disciples for his approaching absence; and two different goodbyes are highlighted in today’s scripture readings: A (loooong) prayer offered the night before he dies, and the Ascension of Jesus into the clouds as he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus practices the art of departure, he invites us to think about what it means to say good-bye with intention, with mindfulness, with love.

In this week's passage from John, the blessing is part of the leaving. And, somehow, the leaving is part of the blessing. It's the evening before Jesus' crucifixion. He knows he will soon be leaving his disciples to fulfill his mission and wants them to be prepared. Jesus has been teaching them about his nature, mission and destiny, and about their role and future in all of this. And now on the night before he dies he prays for them.

And what does he pray for? Not that it will be easy, he knows it won't, but that God will support the disciples amid their challenges and that they will be united with each other and with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. He asks for God's support and protection of those he leaves behind saying, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one."

Oh, how much easier it would be, the disciples may have thought, if you would only take us with you. Yet that is not Jesus' promise. Instead the promise he makes is that the disciples then and now will not be alone in the struggle. This difficult, and at times painful world, is beloved of God; and we are sent into this world to witness to the truth that God loves the whole world, even when the world runs contrary to God's design or desire.

This brings us to the second goodbye, which was actually the first reading today from the book of Acts. After Jesus was raised from the dead, imagine how thrilled his followers were to see him again, to realize that that first goodbye, on the night before he died, was more of a "see you again soon," than a final blessing. But now just before he is lifted up into the clouds, Jesus gives them a goodbye blessing—God be with you. Jesus tells them the good news, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ...to the ends of the earth."

Jesus promises that he will be present through the power of the Holy Spirit; and from that moment, and throughout all the faithful generations, his followers have been witnesses to Christ's presence in the world to the ends of the earth. In his final goodbye, Jesus blesses us with a sense of purpose. Whether at home or school, work or a place of volunteering, and whether the coming week brings challenges or blessings or some measure of each, God continues to be with us, to strengthen us and use us to care for each other and this world.

Consider this week how you have been blessed to be a blessing to the ends of the earth. How will you be Christ's body in the world?

- Through being a good friend to another or listening to someone else's struggle.
- Volunteering to help another in need.
- By standing up for those who are vulnerable—people who suffer from mental illness, people who find their home and community living on the streets of Chicago, those who are accused of wrongdoing simply by 'living while being black.'
- Will you pray for someone who is in need or invite someone to worship to hear the truth about God's love for everyone.

Christ is present in this meal we share. And through this meal we are empowered to be Christ's body for the world. As St. Theresa of Avila summed up in her beloved poem,

*Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,*

*Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*