Collect: O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Fr. Curtis is currently on vacation until May 29th, so this morning you get the pinch hitter.

This past Thursday the Church celebrated Ascension Day, the day the risen Lord vanished from sight from our physical world into the spiritual one. As I read somewhere this week, Jesus was given permission to leave earth and work from home.

Our first reading finds the apostles standing there together talking with Jesus. When before their eyes, I expect with mouths gaping open and looking towards the sky, Jesus, just like that, rises up into a cloud and out of sight. When they drop their eyes to ground level they find two men standing beside them dressed in white robes who question them as to what they’ve been doing looking up into the air. They pair tells the disciples that the way in which they’ve just seen Jesus leave is the same way in which he will return.

My commentary this morning is coming to you from our home in Bethlehem NH, not Judea. For those of you who know our place we have plenty of sky in which to look towards the heavens. Perhaps like me, you too, in the past couple of months of uncertainty, have lifted up your eyes and hands and voices skyward and looked up at the emptiness. imploring Jesus to return and make the world right.

It seems to me today’s second reading was written just for times like these. It’s short and worth repeating.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his
glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen

All of us worldwide are suffering from the strange fiery ordeal called coronavirus. We’re being tested in pandemic ways not seen in over 100 years. Hunker down under the mighty hand of God and cast our anxiety on him, the writer of Peter extolls us. Remember that you are not alone in your suffering in that all our brothers and sisters throughout the world are in the same boat. Rest in the knowledge that God’s grace alone will in the end sustain us and lift us up.

My friends we certainly are living in a time of fiery ordeal. I still play with the Mattatuck Drum Band, the oldest continuous band in the US. One of the tunes we play is titled “The World Turned Upside Down”. This children’s song was played by the Colonials as an insult while parading before the defeated British Army at its surrender in Yorktown. Yes, like the defeated British our current world is upside down, but not out.

When I get flipped in my whitewater kayak, upside down, lasts only just so long before rolling it back upright. We will get through this unsettling time. How can we not, as Jesus makes it clear in the Gospel when he asks God to “protect them, that’s us, in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

We have to wait until next week as the celebration of Pentecost comes to us when we are once again reminded of the anointing of the Holy Spirit falling down upon us. We cannot forget that we have been Baptized with that same Spirit and with that comes the power to get us through whatever is thrown in our path. That power like a charged but untapped battery sits dormant within us unless and until we flip the switch.

Lest we lose heart it is that one and the same Spirit that has not left us comfortless in these not so normal days. Of course, if you’re like me, you dearly miss Eucharist and the coming together as the All Saints’ version of the body of Christ. The simple fact
that you are here right now tells us that the Spirit is at work in a way un-thought of a couple of months ago.

I spent 30 years in a small parish in CT. The church building is located on property that once was a large open farm and surrounded by a fine shaded lawn. Coffee hour was held week after week in a 15 by 30 foot room with large windows and pretty bad acoustics. Someone once suggested we move outside on the lawn in nice weather. Even though the room had a door directly to the outside the idea was stopped in its tracks because, after all, how could you get the coffee through the screens?

I believe God in our midst is creating a new normal. What that looks like we have only to trust and flick the switch of the Spirit to “on”. It means removing the screens that blind us to what has always been and open ourselves to the possibilities of what could be.

Look around you, Zoom is everywhere saving traveling miles and gallons of gas and connecting people in ways like never before. Our parish feeding ministries continue, but with a few tweeks, reaching out to the food insecure of our community. Our online service music has tuned our ears with a broader brush of what lies beyond our walls, even as Jim continues to offer praise with sounds from inside All Saints'.

The vestry has reached out to all our members with a phone connection. Fr Curtis captains the ship from the office. Services of morning and evening prayer, and compline have been added. The Centering Prayer group meets virtually, and Zoom book groups are about to launch. Our lectors lend their familiar voices to the weekly readings and the prayers of the people continue unbroken. I know myself and others have commented that their personal prayer and reflection times have increased.

Look around at your local town. Food is gathered, neighbor helping neighbor, connections are being fostered. Just the idea that we are actually connected to our neighbors might be a revelation for some. People pitching in making masks, sharing rides, checking in on those shut in, yes the Spirit is alive. Even, and for what it’s worth, reluctantly for some, the government is actually doing it's best for the wellbeing of us all. I read yesterday where a group of churches has banded together to pay off the medical debt of 700 people. The Spirit is alive and well among us.

Words from the suffrages of Morning/Evening prayer ask, Let not the needy Oh Lord be forgotten nor the hope of the poor be taken away. All of us perhaps now or at some other time will be both needy and poor, be it in spirit, health, finance, or hit by some curveball that we never saw coming.
What will tomorrow’s Church look like? I think none of us really knows any more than we can be sure of what comes with any new sunrise, today. What we can count on is Jesus Christ, with us as his hands and feet, being there when we call out in need yesterday, today and beyond. We need nothing more, nothing less. Thanks be to God.