

Acts 1: 6-14

Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2026

The Rev. Katherine Bush

“Do not leave us comfortless.” Such a relevant and poignant prayer from that first opening moment this morning. *Do not leave us comfortless*. Looking around for comfort when everything seems to be breaking, seeking comfort when what we love is leaving can feel futile. Certainly, those men of Galilee standing there, looking up at the space from which Jesus vanished, certainly they also wanted a little comfort at that departure point, not the impatient urging from two men in white robes.

It had to feel a little like Groundhog Day for them. They were back with Jesus, trying to keep up and hoping that this time would be the moment when the great revolution would happen. Surely, now was the time when all would finally be righted - meaning the downfall for all those who had done them wrong, the great reversal of fortunes. They're together! Jesus is with them! They're going to get this show back on the road! And then once again, the rug is pulled out from under them. He leaves. It's not violent this time, not like last time's frightening and brutal ending, when they thought everything was over. But even without the cruelty, it still must have felt like another ending, another loss, another disappointment, another time when they found themselves staring at the empty place where Jesus used to be.

And couldn't they just have a moment, please? Could those antsy angels give them just a minute to bring their collective gaze down from that empty sky, to lock eyes with each other, realizing that once again it was just them, left behind to try to figure out what happens now. Jesus keeps leaving; this story keeps ending, and ending abruptly, seemingly without warning. A little comfort would be nice, actually.

I don't know about you, but I'm a little wrung out from all the endings, * *from the daily collapsing, from the “departure of norms,” a pallid euphemism for so many things that I was taught to count on and expect that are now crumbling. The rug keeps getting pulled out from under us. People we love get sick. Friends disappoint. The headlines blare their hourly horrors. And it would be nice to have just a moment before the next wave knocks us down, just a moment to stand still and feel the weight. The stories keep ending, Jesus keeps leaving, and it would be nice if we could catch a break before being called to account.

Do not leave us comfortless. I suppose there's something intended as comfort in the angels' pushy question, “Why are you standing here looking up toward heaven?” Perhaps you have experienced the measure of relief that comes from taking the next step, even when you don't know where you're going yet. We know the consolation of tasks: making a meal for a grieving family, calling our representatives, tackling the laundry. None of it will change the

narrative, but it is a kind of comfort to be busy, to have something to do when there's nothing to be done.

Consider, though, that it's not just the *busyness* that consoles us when we occupy our hands or move our feet. When we take that next step, when the men of Galilee walk on to Jerusalem, something more is happening. When we move, we are saying we believe something big and true; we are proclaiming that we believe that the beginning comes after the end. It's a simple and impossible idea (and the succinct phrasing here comes from the writing of Rebecca Solnit, though she'd be the first to say that she didn't invent the idea). The beginning comes after the end.

This is no easy comfort, not exactly a soft place to land where we can veg out and disassociate with ice cream or mindless scrolling. It's not the cheap assurance that things will just get better on their own somehow. The beginning comes after the end. It's a demanding hope for a challenging future, a future much like those two men in white seem to have in mind. It's the end *again*, and now into that empty space, something new is on the way. This comfort is not comfortable. Jesus is gone, all over again, and whatever is coming next doesn't yet have a shape or form. And we don't know how long it will take or what it will cost.

And actually, what will unfold for those men of Galilee is a confounding fire and a jumble of languages and arrests and conversions and betrayals and companionship and far-flung journeys and arguments and divisive moments and joy. Quite a beginning...the Spirit is on the way, the church itself is beginning right in the middle of this ending.

In his poem "Scaffolding," the masterful Seamus Heaney describes * first * the careful construction of ladders and joints, the scaffolding upon which the masons must stand to do their work. Yet this scaffolding is exactly what must be broken down, collapsed, and carried away to reveal the true structure they are building. The poem concludes, "So, if my dear, there sometimes seem to be / Old bridges coming down between you and me / Never fear. We may let the scaffolds fall / Confident that we have built our wall." The falling apart is not a design flaw; it is part and parcel of the work of this world. The beginning comes after the end. Every time.

Every time. Yes, sometimes the beginnings are slow, or sometimes they're so different that we can't recognize them as beginnings. We stand there looking around, feeling despair start to climb through our chests. It creeps in because endings are so hard, **so heartbreaking, so disappointing. Every time. We get stuck, every time thinking this end really is The End, worse than all the other ones. Forgetting that we've been here, or somewhere like here, before.

Jesus keeps leaving, and so many other hopes and plans fall apart; the story keeps ending. Every time. And the beginning comes after the end. Every time. A comfort, yes, and a comfort that requires us to move, to head back to Jerusalem or forward into some unknown future, to the ends of the earth. We are, it turns out, not left comfortless: the story keeps ending, and the beginning comes after the end.