

Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Sermon Title: "Carry On"

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Let us pray. Dear Lord, as we look up to you and look out at the ministry before us, enrich our journey once more as we seek to serve you. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable and pleasing to you - our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

What do you carry with you? Now I know that there are many intangible things that we certainly carry with us - memories, lessons learned, wisdom that has been shared with us. Still, is there something tangible that, no matter where you go, no matter the circumstances you will face, and no matter how life may change that you keep close on this journey before us? Perhaps it is a reminder of someone, a good luck charm, something passed down to you, something that is very practical and useful, or perhaps it is a symbol that brings hope or peace into your life every time you look upon it. Do you have any of those tangible reminders that often call you to remember the intangible things in your life? For me, while different periods of my life have seen different items that had particular meaning, I think of two things that have been with me for the longest - for probably 10 years now and they both come from my late grandfather's SUV which became essentially my first car. When my grandmother gave it to me so that I could get back and forth to college, it had everything in it just as my grandfather had left it. And while there was a lot that I didn't keep forever, like the cassette tapes of Grandpa Jones and Boxcar Willie, there are two things I have kept beyond the time that I drove that car. The first is very practical - a portable tire pump, the kind that plugs into the car and can fill up a tire that is getting low or has a slow leak. One of the things I remember about my grandfather was his constant care and concern for the safety and well-being of others when they drove - I think he gave one of these pumps to my grandmother and to my parents because it was so important to him that we had it to help keep us safe - and so that pump lives on and has been rather useful several times

in my life. The second thing is more sentimental. When my uncle passed away, this is my grandfather's son, my grandfather kept a copy of his memorial card from the funeral service in the center console. While we never talked about it, I think it was his way of keeping the memory of his son with him. And when I started driving that car, I added the memorial card that we had for my grandfather, keeping both of their memories close. And while many things that you can end up collecting in a car have been discarded, in every car I have had since then, I continue to carry that portable tire pump and those memorial cards. And with them comes the lessons shared, even as cars change as does the time - to care and have concern for the well-being of others and to always remember those who loved you and whom you loved.

I wonder what, if anything, the first disciples may have carried with them as their journey continued to unfold, especially beyond the resurrection and even more so after the ascension. When they would no longer see Jesus in the same way they have grown accustomed, when their relationship with him would look different, when following him would take on new meanings and new ministry, did they have any tangible reminder that called them back to the heart of it all? Not because the thing holds any particular power but because of what it would have reminded them of as they continue onward particularly as they see Jesus ascend and now must face the world without Jesus physically present but present in a different way. In our scripture reading today, as Jesus prepares to ascend, he responds to a question that basically asks is this the time we have been waiting for? In some ways, it's a question of is our work done? Will the world be transformed and restored? And Jesus essentially says, "no, your work your mission in the world continue, they carry on. The disciples will continue to witness to the teachings of Jesus all throughout the world and they will continue to strive for justice, righteousness, and peace. With them, they carry the teachings. They carry the mission and purpose. And soon, they will come to carry with them the gift of the Holy Spirit, as their life, and work, and ministry continue. As they carried these intangible things, these tasks, these teachings, I just can't help but wonder if they carried a tangible

reminder of it all, especially with so much change around them. Something to look at, to hold and remember where they have come from, to remind them why they were doing what they were doing, as their work continued beyond the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. Did they have something which grounded them and took them back to the heart of their faith as they would now face a new and changing way of being the church?

You know, on this Memorial Day weekend, the idea of carrying something has an additional meaning and layer for me. As we remember those who served our country and those who were killed while defending their nation, their families, friends, and strangers endowed with the same liberties and rights by our God, killed while doing what they felt called to do to preserve freedom, killed while they were striving for a more just world, I too think about what they may have carried with them as they faced warfare. What item in their pocket or pack reminded them of why they were doing what they were doing? Whether a photograph, dog tags, a trinket from home, a stuffed animal from a child, a prayer book or sacred text important to their faith, what did they carry with them to help them carry on? Some of those things may have reminded them of their faith or their heritage. Others may have reminded them why they were there. Some may have held the memories of spouses, children, parents, family, and friends. What did they carry which reminded them of their mission, purpose, and power in life? What tangible thing did they hold which brought comfort, created peace, and promoted courage through it all – which reminded them of the intangible blessings of this life? What grounded them as they embraced their sense of duty and may have even brought peace in their final moments? What brought them back to the core of who they were in the midst of it all?

Beloved People of God, no matter what we are facing, one thing is for certain: we need to carry on. And we need to carry with us the things, tangible and intangible, which call us to remember why we are doing what we are doing. Especially, in moments of struggle, when we find ourselves in times like now which can feel so foreign to us,

which can be uncomfortable, unsettling, and worrisome, we need reminders of our cornerstone and grounding. We need reminders of what is the most important thing in our lives. As a people of faith, we need to carry those reminders that call us to consider the lessons of Jesus. We need to live by them, now more than ever. We can't lose the core of who we are as the church of Jesus Christ, even when our ways of being and our ways of ministering, and the world around us may look different. We can't lose who we are as a people loved and redeemed. As a people called to follow the ways of Jesus and to love our world into wholeness, we must carry on, grounded in our faith and true to our core and cornerstone. Whatever will remind you of that, carry it with you as we carry on together. So be it and may it be so. Amen.