**Some Kind of Wonderful**

Sermon preached by Jennifer Hudson, St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, Bethel, CT, May 17, 2026

*Can I get a witness (Can I get a witness)*
*Do you know what I'm talkin' about,*
*ladies, are you listening? (Can I get a witness)*
*Wonderful*
*(Some kinda wonderful)*

The first time I heard British singer Joss Stone's soulful adaptation of the song "Some Kind of Wonderful," I couldn't believe my ears. (Just picture me with my earbuds, listening on my cellphone, exclaiming "sing it, girl"!) Stone's rendering was a far cry from the rock and roll version I'd known that Grand Funk Railroad recorded in 1974. Stone's 2003 version not only changed the gender of the subject possessing the "some kind of wonderful," but also was infused with soul and gospel and vocals that could only be described as sensual and expressive. Stone's "Can I get a witness?" section leaned into church call-and-response, a way of making personal joy communal. What I didn't know, however, was that the song was first recorded, not by Grand Funk Railroad, but by a band named Soul Brothers Six in 1967. That version typified the upbeat soul popular during that period. While Stone's version marked a return to the song's original soul roots, her rendition was slower and smoother. What listening to all three versions of "Some Kind of Wonderful" taught me was that as much as we look back with nostalgia at the old ways of doing things, there are also new ways of expressing the old that still manage to preserve something of the original—and that is the lesson which the disciples learn this morning in Acts as they remain staring up at the heavens: that they are being asked to bear witness to all they have received from Jesus in a new way.

Let's try to put ourselves in the sandals of the disciples in this scene. They are still reacting to loss and clinging to the past, even as they are trying to figure out what comes next. Their inspiring and charismatic teacher and friend had been executed, had come back to life, and had been reunited with them for forty days after his resurrection. When they ask "Lord, is this the time you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" they're probably thinking Jesus is going to stay with them forever.

Instead, Jesus answers that the time and place of restoration is not for them to know. Instead, he says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses…to the ends of the earth." He's then raised up into heaven, a cloud hiding him from view. He's gone. For Good. Or so it seems.

Staring up into the sky is the disciples' way of trying to stop the clock, of wishing they could go back to the life they knew with Jesus by their sides. Maybe they're secretly wishing that he'll return if they gaze upward long enough. In focusing on the life they knew, the disciples miss what they have now: each other. And they're also missing what they're (and we're) called to be now: a community ready to love and be loved in the way Jesus loves.

Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor says in her sermon titled "Looking Up Toward Heaven": "Ascension Day is the day the present Lord became absent, which may be why it is the most forgotten feast day of the church year. Who wants to celebrate being left behind? Who wants to mark the day that Jesus went out of this world, never to be seen again?" However, Brown Taylor explains that we do see Jesus…in the ordinary people and places and things in this world.

In John's Gospel, we overhear Jesus praying for the disciples, saying, "They are in the world… I am no longer in the world, but they are." Jesus is sending them into that world so that

they may continue his mission in making God's extravagant and all-inclusive love known. In other words, Jesus doesn't want the disciples to be passive spectators looking up into the clouds with longing and nostalgia for their good old days together. Jesus wants them to go out and be active witnesses empowered with new ways of expressing and sharing and being what they've learned from him. Essentially, Jesus is asking the disciples, "Can I get a witness?" Can you attest to and live out the "some kind of wonderful" about God that has been revealed to you in me? Can you give that "some kind of wonderful" expression in this world instead of saving it for the one to come? Can you trust and know that I am present in you and in the world in a new way, that as the Father and I are one, you also are one?

Then there's this other "some kind of wonderful" to come, this promise of the power of the Holy Spirit. We won't see it until next week, but the Spirit will infuse them with soul, so to speak. They'll be able to speak in languages they haven't known to preach to peoples who haven't heard about Jesus. They'll be able to perform healings in Jesus' name. This really is a whole new way of Jesus being present—not *with* them, but *through* them. Granted, it's not the same as Jesus being on earth doing these things. The disciples may not be able to match Jesus' charisma. They're going to have their own styles of witnessing. It's just like taking a popular song and remaking it with a different sound. The words—the heartbeat—are the same, but the song, the expressive style of those words, is given a new mode of being in the world. And we, too, are asked to bear witness to God's extravagant and all-inclusive love in new ways as the Church and as this St. Thomas' community of faith.

What old songs—literal or metaphoric—do we have on a loop? Maybe we're replaying events that led to a lost relationship. Maybe we're replaying days when people seemed kinder and could agree to disagree without hostility. Maybe we're replaying days when we could do our

own thinking instead of running to ChatGPT. In truth, we will always wax nostalgic and try to enshrine the past, but being stuck in that never-ending loop of wistfulness keeps us from being witnesses to the new ways God's love is revealed in the world.

Witnessing is telling and re-telling and re-interpreting what we have seen, what we have experienced, what we know to be true. Witness is saying, "This is what I've seen of God. This is where I've encountered hope and love." Jesus calls "Can I get a witness?" and we are being asked to respond in a way of that makes our personal joy of encounters with God's love communal. And that is "some kind of wonderful."