

Grace and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we celebrate Ascension Day!

The Ascension of Jesus happened 40 days after Easter.

I'll save you the math – 40 days after our Easter was this past Thursday.

We often transfer or celebrate the Ascension of Jesus the Sunday after the 40 days.

The early church saw the Ascension as an integral part of the resurrection.

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples over those 40 days.

The Ascension of Christ is the culmination of Jesus ministry on earth.

It is Christ's enthronement next to God.

And, we have different accounts of the resurrection,

Jesus' resurrection appearance and

the Ascension to help us understand what that means for us.

We just heard Luke's 2-part Ascension narrative from the gospel of Luke and in the first chapter of Acts.

In the gospel reading,

Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures.

When we read the bible,

our approach can be one of expectation,

expectation that Jesus will show us something new.

We can expect that God will provide

understanding where there is confusion,

knowledge where there is ignorance,

wisdom where there is silence.

Inviting God in this way is a good approach to many areas of our lives.

Next Jesus tells the disciples that they are witnesses and to carry a message of repentance, forgiveness and all that they have seen to all nations, to the whole world.

This is when they become Apostles.

Up to now, they have been disciples, learning with Jesus.

They've been riding with training wheels on.

He tells them they have an important role to fulfill,  
and yet Jesus tells them to wait.  
Wait to be clothed with the power on high.

We, too, need periods of discernment as we  
carry on this work that Jesus has left for us.  
In the Ascension scripture,  
Jesus shows us how to invite God into our daily efforts to  
witness to what God has done in Jesus.  
We need time to receive the power from on high so  
we work in concert with God's will for us and for the world.

So Jesus tells them to wait.  
Wait for power that is beyond you.  
And, then he ascends to heaven.  
And, the apostles – the ones who are being sent –  
are joyful – prayerful and joyful.

As he left, Jesus blessed them.  
A blessing that surely meant that they could not fail.  
Did that mean that their lives would always be easy.  
No, but it did mean that they could not fail because God was involved.  
And, 2000+ years later, we are proof that  
the blessing of Jesus continues to  
support those witnessing to God's work in our lives.

In Acts, Luke picks up the story with movement forward.  
Luke tells us the apostles asked for the timeline of  
God's plan to upend the rulers of this world and  
restore the kingdom to Israel.  
Jesus said you don't need to worry about that.  
That's God's work.  
Your work is to be my witnesses in Jerusalem,  
in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

It doesn't sound like God is concerned with one certain nation or people.  
Or with one nation or people triumphing over others,

amassing more and more power or money  
or dominating, dictating others.  
God is concerned with all people and nations.

Jesus didn't say, go only to those within these borders,  
or who have these papers.  
Jesus didn't tell them, go only to religious types,  
or business people, or powerful people or  
people who love in this way.  
Jesus said, "go and tell them about me,  
tell them all how I lived and how I love God."

Jesus came to earth so we might see clearly the  
character of God and know fully God's intent for humankind.  
At the end of his ministry, our Lord returns to God—  
imprinted with our humanness.  
As Jesus ascends to God,  
God learns from the inside out something more about humanity.

And then Jesus was gone.  
In the Ascension, Jesus changed from being present to us on earth in  
this realm of space and time to being present in the realm of eternity,  
in the transcendent heavenly realm.<sup>1</sup>

Our finite language about the ascension,  
limited in every age,  
is necessarily symbolic and metaphorical.  
It affirms literal realities that are infinite,  
and therefore ultimately indescribable.

And as they were looking up after him,  
two men in white robes re-focus the apostles to their earthly time and place.  
Jesus will come again they say.  
Your work is here.  
You have been given your tasks.  
The disciples did their work.  
And we have ours.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.journeywithjesus.net](http://www.journeywithjesus.net)

Our work is to baptize people of any age and help them grow in faith.

Our work is to encourage one another in our successes and failures to share Jesus' love with the world.

Our work is to serve within and outside of this community in thoughtful, kind, caring and faithful ways.

Thanks be to God. Amen.