

Ascension of Our Lord

May 9, 2024 (Year B)



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

We must, therefore, conceive of [Christ's] ascension and Lordship as something active, energetic and continuous, and must not imagine that he sits above while we hold the reins of government down here. Nay, he ascended up thither for the reason that there he can best do his work and exercise dominion.

– Martin Luther –

Sermon on the Ascension, 1523

Acts 1:1–11

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” These are the words a witness responds to before they take the stand in a trial. Lawyers will then pepper them with questions about the case, trying to convince a judge and jury of what is the “truth” of the case before them. In the process, attorneys are quick to interrupt a witness if they think the truth is being embellished in any way. A witness is meant to stick to the cold, hard facts. Emotions are not welcome. Conjecture and opinions are highly discouraged.

After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared to his disciples and commissioned them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. It was to be their job to go to places they never thought they’d go in order to present the facts of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God.

- *How often is religion reduced to emotion and opinion? Does that approach actually influence some into believing? What is the weakness of a purely subjective and emotional faith?*
- *Reread Acts 1:1–3. How and why does the writer (Luke) seek to demonstrate that the truth of Jesus Christ is based on fact, rather than on opinion?*

After Jesus instructed his disciples about their mission in his stead, he was lifted up into heaven in their viewing. At the moment of his ascension, two men in white robes appeared asking, “Why do you look up into heaven?” They affirmed that Jesus will return in the same way he left. Until that time, the disciples have work to do; they must bear witness to the world about the truth of Jesus Christ.

- *How do we get caught “looking up” when instead we are commissioned to be witnesses to the world?*
- *How can human speculation about the end-times actually get in the way of the mission to which we’ve been called?*

Psalms 47

Psalms 47 is included in a group of psalms that are referred to as, “Ethronement Psalms” (other examples include psalms 93, 96, 97, 98, and 99). Historically, such psalms were often read publicly at the ceremony of an earthly king being put into power. Actually though, God is the one whose kingship is praised in these psalms.

- *As both King and Messiah, in what way does Jesus fulfill the description of God in this psalm? What particular verse makes this psalm particularly appropriate to Ascension Day?*

Ephesians 1:15–23

Paul gave thanks for the Christians in Ephesus, praising them for their love for one another. He informed them that they were in his prayers, specifically for God to give them an increased knowledge of Christ and a wisdom that would guide them. The purpose of this was so that they might trust in God and have a deep abiding hope in the power of God to save. He prayed that the eyes of their hearts would be opened and enlightened.

- *What does it mean to have the eyes of our hearts opened? What will we see differently when true enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is granted to us?*

In verses 22–23, we find an image found elsewhere in the writing of Paul — that of the church as the “body of Christ” and Christ himself as its “head.” This is connected directly to our creedal faith that Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father. Martin Luther used these verses to affirm the doctrine of real physical presence of Christ in Holy Communion against a man named Zwingli, who said that Jesus couldn’t truly be with us on earth because he is up in heaven, sitting next to God’s throne.

- *What does it mean to say that Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father? How is that more than just a “location”? Why is the truth of Christ’s ascension actually the reason he is able to be anywhere he chooses?*

Luke 24:44–53

When Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, he reminded them of all that he had taught them. He reiterated his teachings once more in light of the cross and resurrection. Luke said that Jesus “opened their minds” to understand.

- *In this context, what does it mean to have our minds opened by Christ? How is this different from the common way people speak of “having an open mind”? In what way does faith make the truth even more specific?*

Finally, after all they had been through, the disciples were able to understand who Jesus is and what his mission on earth was all about. As he led his disciples out of the city of Jerusalem, he blessed them and was taken up into heaven. Their response to all of this was to worship him and head back to the temple to praise God.

- *How does a deeper understanding of the Scriptures — specifically the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus — help us to be more obedient to his will and his ways?*