

# Sermon: Ascension Day

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Year B  
Acts 1:1-11  
Psalm 93  
Ephesians 1:15-23  
Luke 24:44-53

Today's readings from Acts... and the Gospel... both tell us that Jesus was taken up into heaven... the Greek word that's translated as heaven... can also be translated as sky... if Jesus simply flew up into the sky like Superman... then we have to ask ourselves where he landed... but we know that the world isn't flat... and heaven isn't a place up there...

When Pete Homeyer preached about the Ascension two years ago... he raised the possibility that Jesus left our four dimensional realm of height... width... length... and time... and may have entered one of the other twenty-nine dimensions about which we're learning... or maybe he entered all of them at once...

But waves rise up from the sea... and then return to the ocean... rain comes down from the clouds... and then returns to them through evaporation... and Jesus came from the Ground of Being... and then returned to it... and this going kept him from being seen the way the disciples were used to seeing him... though it paved the way for Pentecost...

We can't see Jesus' feet very clearly on our bulletin cover... and although the event we commemorate today has generated countless paintings and reliefs and etchings and woodblocks... almost all of them focused on Jesus' ascent... so much so... that many Christians don't think that ascension has anything to do with them... but The Rev. Barbara Lundblad writes... that in some of them... if you look *not up in the clouds*... but down on the ground... you can see a set of footprints... a place that marks where Jesus was... some artists have painted indentations in the rock... others have etched black-

and-white footprints on the ground not far from where the disciples are standing with their mouths open...

Today... we not only commemorate the Ascension... but we also recognize the end of another year of Sunday School... and another year of public school... we celebrate that these young people continue to grow... that through love... their parents provide for them... do the best they can for them... give them opportunities to be formed... to learn... to socialize and have fun... to grow in the love of God embodied in Jesus...

But the process of growing up can be messy... it can sometimes be a challenge to see them for who they are when our focus is on who we want them to be... the love we have for them can be so strong that we want to carry them over all that messiness... and spare them any pain... our desire for their success can be so powerful that we might get irritated when they don't already know the things we want them to know... as I have with Rachel... but when we do that... we also take away some of their opportunities to learn... but we remember from Ephesians 3... that God's power... working in us... can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine...

In the Gospel we're told that *he led them out as far as Bethany... and lifting up his hands... he blessed them... and while he was blessing them... he was carried up into heaven... while he was blessing them...*

Theologian Thomas Troeger wrote: Christ was in the act of blessing them as he left... he had reason to curse them... they had abandoned him... denied him... ran off like scared rabbits... even dismissed his resurrection as an idle tale when the women first reported it... but chastisement and cursing were not what Jesus was about... was not what he left them with... and their last memory was not that he had blessed them and then stopped... not that he had finished and they all said *Amen*... not that they wrote down the words of blessing and used it ever after as part of their prayer life... but rather... the process of blessing was continuing as he left them... and just because they

could no longer see Christ did not mean that he was no longer blessing them... in fact... it suggests that the blessing would never stop...

That's why they returned to Jerusalem with great joy... and they were continually in the temple blessing God... because blessing begets blessing... and this is how Luke's Gospel ends... with the ceaseless blessing of Christ...

At the end of today's reading from Acts... two men in white robes suddenly stood by them... and said... *Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?*

Well... if I saw anyone float up into the sky and disappear from sight... I'd probably stand around with my mouth open too... but if as the two men reminded the disciples... that *Jesus will come in the same way... they saw him go into heaven...* then why wouldn't we want to look up... and why would we want to look to earth... where things have turned bad and we are forever tempted to do wrong... why should we not try to get beyond this fleshly life... to be with Jesus in the spirit... if not in the sky...

The men in white robes didn't give an answer... but Jesus did... he just spent forty days teaching the disciples about God's commonwealth... comparable in some ways to his forty days in the wilderness being shaped by the Spirit... and after these forty days... the disciples asked him if this was when he would restore the Kingdom to Israel... he said it wasn't for them to know the times or periods that the Father has set... but... he told them... *they would receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them... and they would be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth...* and in Luke's Gospel... we can see Jesus' footprints all over the pages of the text... and the work of the Holy Spirit is not left to our imagination... but takes shape in Jesus' life... in his actions... and in his teachings...

And when we provide diapers for those who can't buy them... when we collect food or donate money to those who are hungry... when we teach English and citizenship classes to refugees who have had to make this their new home... when we visit those in the hospital or in jail... and when we guide our children with just enough holding on... and just enough letting go... we are doing the Spirit's work too...

These may seem like small efforts in the face of such enormous need... but we cannot know when God will fulfill all things... and so even though we may look around us... here on earth to see the work that needs to be done... it helps to know that we can always look up... to that inner place where Jesus leads us... and to our own Ascensions...

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