

**The Liturgy for May 24, 2020**  
**The Ascension of Jesus**

**~Thought for Meditation:**

*To live in this world you must be able to do three things:  
To love what is mortal,  
to hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends on it,  
and when the time comes, to let it go  
to let it go.     Mary Oliver*

**~GATHERING :**

So, today we are continuing on from last Sunday, where we addressed the question: “What was going on between the Resurrection of Jesus, and when he actually leaves earth?” And if you didn’t realize there was a gap between resurrection and his departing...you are so not alone. We’ll get to that!

Today is the day when the church celebrates the Ascension of Jesus. Technically Ascension Day was this past Thursday, but we often celebrate it on the next Sunday. That is, if it is celebrated at all. I often do, because I believe it is one of our oddest stories...and I really like to pay attention to those ones; to see how/if they are still speaking to us today. So...the ascension refers to the day when Jesus ascended, or was ‘lifted up,’ (to heaven/ to ‘beyond.’) 40 days after the resurrection. Luke tells us the story in both the second gospel and in his other work the Acts of the Apostles. Interestingly he changes the setting of the story, which suggests to me that this is not a story to be understood in a historical or geographic sense. But it has a lot to say, I think, about presence and absence. Something we have been on rather intimate terms with through these pandemic days.

**~LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE**

**~CALL TO WORSHIP**

**Leader:** Christ is risen!

**People:** Christ is risen indeed!

**Leader:** Alleluia!

**People:** Alleluia and Amen!

**~OPENING PRAYER ENDING WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER**

Forsaking chariots of fire, and fan-fared brass, as quietly as he came, O God,

**Jesus leaves.**

Just as from the grave he had to rise, so too, he must depart, it seems,  
**that he might be ‘everywhere.’**

It is a story we really prefer to leave aside, O God,

**So odd and full of absence as it is.**

So we ask you to hold us in the mystery, as we pray together, saying:

**Our Father who art in heaven,**

**Hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come,**

**Thy will be done,**

**On earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread,**

**And forgive us our trespasses,**

**As we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation,**

**But deliver us from evil,**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,**

**For ever and ever. Amen.**

**~Scripture: Acts 1: 1-11**

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven. After his suffering he presented himself alive to the disciples by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This’, he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the time. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven?’

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

**~Reflection:**

So, yes...Happy Ascension Day!

Truly...this is a church holiday that gets short shrift. We know how to do Christmas and Easter up right, don't we? But Ascension Day?

It's gotten lost in the shuffle. But not today my friends! Come on, we can do this. So...how to celebrate?

Perhaps we can serve fish, a favourite meal of Jesus. But to really get into the spirit of it, let's make sure our bread is really *risen*, or a towering stack of pancakes maybe? And Lorna Ball makes a killer 7 layer salad. And I know a recipe for mile high lemon pie. So, Ascension Day menu, sorted! And we could fly kites at the Rec Centre, or shoot off model rockets, or climb Mount Carlton as a nice stand in for Mount Olivet where Jesus took the disciples (wait...is Mt Carlton even open?) But you see my point, anything that takes us “up”...out of this earthly realm; something that leaves us craning our necks and peering skyward...heavenward. Just like the disciples, who were watching that day as Jesus ascends, as he is “lifted up, obscured by a cloud.” Almost immediately, 2 men in white appear and ask: “Men of Galilee, why are you looking up?” Now, throughout the gospels the disciples are often noted for being a bit clueless. But I feel I want to take their part here. I need to take their part in this. Of *course* they are looking up. It is the last place they saw Jesus, as he departed from their side...from their sight. It seems long ago, or maybe just like yesterday, that a young Chelsea, our “middlest,” was catching a plane to head to France for a year of

study. She was just 19, and there weren't cell phones then. A year felt like forever. I can still remember as we stood at that airport window, and then we ran to our car, and drove around to the back of Halifax Airport, and parked. I can still remember as we stood by the fence, waiting and watching waiting and watching: watching, until her plane was a speck in the sky. And then... gone.

The scripture from Acts says only that Jesus was taken 'up' but tradition says it was to heaven. In the Apostle's Creed, one of the most ancient faith statements of Christianity, it reads:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried;  
he descended into hell;  
**the third day he rose again from the dead;**  
**he ascended into heaven,** and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost;  
the holy catholic Church;  
the communion of saints;  
the forgiveness of sins;  
the resurrection of the body;  
and the life everlasting. AMEN.

It's all about that semi colon. You have every reason to let Ascension Day slide. Because we have learned to slide right from Jesus' rising, into his ascending. In one fell swoop. We have co-mingled the resurrection and the rising to heaven, thereby forgetting the semi colon that asks us to pause;

And when we forget the semi colon, we forget those 40 days in between, in between resurrection and ascension, where Jesus kept showing up from time

to time, showing himself and his wounded body; sometimes asking for food, and sometimes *making* food to tend to the hungry bodies of his friends.

And there is the heart of the Ascension story for the church through the ages: At Jesus' birth, God dares to come to earth in human form: God was born into the body of the world. In the Ascension, the body of the world is borne back to God. In the Ascension, Jesus' body, pierced side, holes in his hands and feet, his messy, risen body enters into heaven, bringing flesh and blood into the realm of God.

As one writer puts it, "Jesus went first, to prepare the way, so heaven wouldn't be quite so shocked by the likes of us!" However you understand this story, what I think is most sacred about it, most precious about it, is that in the Ascension, creation is pronounced good, all over again.

But what we creatures are not so good at, is saying goodbye. We can picture the forlorn, rag tag band of disciples saying goodbye to Jesus, their leader, their teacher, their beloved friend. Our hearts feel the pull. Because he belongs to us too. Their house felt emptier. Their table, their boat...*everything* highlighted his absence from their midst. It's odd to say, ...but absence has weight to it, doesn't it? Absence sounds like "nothing"...but instead it has a substantive quality. It matters. The disciples knew this. And as they looked at one another they recalled his last words: *you shall be my witnesses*. Us? They must have thought. Oh no. *Yes, You...you will be my heart and my head and my hands as you go. And in all your loving and caring and doing, I will be present with you.*

No more absence.

Present in us.

In and through our bodies, Jesus will be present to the world, as we tend to all those other bodies...everybody that we encounter. Maybe that feels like

a small bubble right now. But it's slowly growing. And if we didn't know ourselves to be part of a large and inter-connected web of beings, surely we have realized it now. In our tending to one another to keep the vulnerable safe, to feed the hungry (even if right now that is just the dog), you are being the very presence of Christ. Daunting, wha?. But I can tell you from experiencing you all, you are more than up to it. Thanks be to God. And Happy Ascension Day! Amen.

**~Closing Prayer:**

We do not know exactly when we can gather together in worship, O, God.  
So, for now we ask that:

When we sing along in our kitchens to an old song on the radio,  
**may it be counted as praise, as hymn.**

And when we read the news and our hearts tighten in our chests,  
**may it be counted as a *Kyrie* – Lord have mercy.**

When our eyes brighten in a smile behind our community masks as we thank the cashier,  
**may it be counted as thanksgiving.**

When we water our plants and wash the dishes or take a shower  
**may it be counted as remembering our baptism.**

When the tears come and our shoulders shake; when our breathing falters,  
**may it be counted as prayer.**

And when we each sit at our table, and eat one more homemade meal, slowly, joyfully, with nothing else demanding our time or attention,  
**may it be counted as holy communion.**

**Amen.**

**~Benediction:**