

## Ascension – 24 May 2020 See You Later...

Today is the day of Ascension...actually, check that. The day of Ascension is exactly 40 days from the day of Resurrection, or Easter Day, which means it was actually the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, or last Thursday for those keeping track of time. :-)

Because we generally don't gather on a Thursday for worship, we are permitted to transfer Ascension Day or other High Holy Days if we wish to. Ascension is kind of a big deal so I choose to celebrate it. Ascension begins three weeks of exciting stuff in the Church. First there is Ascension, then Pentecost, then Trinity Sunday.

Today we celebrate Ascension. While it's a big deal in the Church, well, it has been since the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, only Luke writes of the event. The Lukan community wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, so we get two tellings of the same story from the same community...told in slightly different ways.

In Luke's Gospel the Ascension takes place like this:

"Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God". Not really a whole lot of detail.

The Acts of the Apostles gives us more detail:

Jesus has gathered his disciples together. They ask if this is the time of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Jesus tells them "not yet". He tells them they will receive power when the Holy Spirit has arrived and they will be Jesus' witnesses in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Cool.

Then it says "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 you saw him go into heaven.'

Now, can you IMAGINE being the disciples?

Let's put this in a little perspective. These guys have been following Jesus around for about three years. In just a couple of months they've gone from walking with him in his "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem through the East gate.

They've watched him turn over tables, make a spectacle of the establishment, gather them together to eat. The last supper was different, as they didn't know it was to be the last supper, AND Jesus removed his robe and washed their feet. He did this to humble himself and to remind them that they are called to be servants FIRST.

They're wrapping their heads around this, when all hell lets loose. Judas betrays Jesus, Jesus is arrested, flogged and dragged through the via Dolorosa. He is brought before

Pilate and sentenced by an angry mob and kangaroo court, for blasphemy.

He's then nailed to a cross and hung between two common criminals. And he dies, painfully and misunderstood.

In a state of shock his disciples gather again in the upper room, the last place where were together and safe, and Jesus appears to them, showing his wounds. Yes, Jesus is alive! He invites them to breakfast on the shore and allows Peter to redeem himself from denying Jesus three times.

He says repeatedly, "pay attention to what I'm telling you. I'm only with you for a little while. Then I must return to my father". How could the disciples have understood this? Jesus is telling them that he did die. He showed them that he is again alive. And yet he can't stay for too long. I'm sure the disciples were wondering "Um, say what now?"

So Jesus continues to teach them, yet there is an urgency in his lessons. Pay attention, I won't be with you for long. Especially you Peter, listen up. You're going to be in charge when the next bit happens.

What next bit???

Jesus spends 40 days after the day he first appears again teaching, preaching and proclaiming. He wants his apostles to carry on what he has begun. He wants them to care for the widows and orphans. He needs them to challenge the authority to govern from purpose and love, rather than from fear. He needs the high priests and scribes to understand that people come first, not rules.

So they come to the day of Ascension. Except, they don't call it that. They call it an ordinary day. For our purposes, it happened on a Thursday because that's 40 days from Easter.

Jesus gathers with his apostles. He tells them that he has to leave them so make room for the Paraclete, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. He asks them to remain in Jerusalem until the Spirit arrives, which, for our purposes is seven days later. Pentecost is 50 days from Easter. And that story is to be told next Sunday. :-)

The apostles gather around and question what is going on. Why are we here? What are you teaching us? In Luke's gospel Jesus says "Thus is it written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

In other words, Jesus reminded them of everything he had taught up to that point in time. He opened their minds in ways he hadn't before. Then he led them to Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them. When Jesus departed from them they weren't sad. A bit confused, perhaps. According to Luke's gospel they were continually in the temple blessing Jesus.

Regardless of which is accurate, they waited, as asked to do so.

I have always imagined as Jesus was ascending he said "See you later". Now, I don't speak Aramaic so I'm paraphrasing.

Jesus had been teaching, preaching and proclaiming. He had healed the sick and even raised Lazarus from the dead. His reputation was well-known in the area where he lived and beyond. He wanted his apostles to continue teaching the lessons he had started. Peter was originally called Simon Peter. Jesus changed him to Peter after Petros or Rock.

And even though Peter denied Jesus three times, he was given the opportunity to redeem himself and carry on Jesus' legacy. Together with the other apostles, that's what they did. Peter became the prophet to the Jews and Paul became the prophet to the Gentiles.

In Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus he writes "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers."

On Thursday Thy Kingdom Come began. A 10-day celebration of prayer, it runs from Ascension to Pentecost, which this year falls from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May. One of the main ideas from TKC is to pray for five friends. Simple and effective. You choose five friends to pray for for 10 days. You don't have to pray anything specific. You simply need to pray.

I am a big believer in prayer. I pray first thing in the morning and as I climb into bed at the end of the day. I find myself in prayer often as I am walking in creation, and as I go about my day. And with TKC, I pray specifically for five people in my life.

As British Columbia and, in fact, most of Canada "re-opens" we cannot expect a return to "back to normal", because you see, we can't go back to where we were. We can only go forwards to a time of re-connection. We don't know how long it will be until we can gather again in our Church buildings and when we do, it will be with strict measures in place. Six feet distance, no exchange of the peace, no passing the plate and most difficult of all, no communion. We will need to wear masks and set up hand sanitizing stations. It will look very different from when we last gathered, and very different then it does now.

And with prayer, peace, kindness and hope we will gather together again. In the meantime I'm planning to visit those of our Parishioners who are unable to join us in this way. I will bring a comfortable folding chair, a chair umbrella and a cup of tea or sparkling water and visit, outside, from a safe distance.

Jesus ascended to be with God and to make room for the Holy Spirit.

As we continue in this challenging and ever-changing time, may you know that you are loved deeply and prayed for unceasingly.

Until we meet again let us be kind, wash our hands, say our prayers and in the paraphrased words of Jesus, I say, "See you later".

Amen.

Acts 1.1-11  
Psalm 47  
Ephesians 1.15-23  
Luke 24.44-53

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan  
Pastor, Priest and Prophet  
Christ Church Anglican & Knox United Church  
Fernie, B.C.