

## The Ascension of Our Lord *transferred*

Sunday, 24 May 2020 | 10am Delaware-Maryland Synod Online Worship

Beloved: Grace, mercy and peace be yours and mine from God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What a difference a few weeks can make! In Luke-Acts we see the disciples reacting to Jesus' Ascension with celebration and joy, whereas after the crucifixion, they had scattered in disarray and fear; worried that the same fate would befall them; they had run, fleeing for their lives. When they did come together, they huddled in a room with a locked door. Their fear had totally paralyzed them. Once confident of their ability to go forth and accomplish the mission that had been entrusted to them, now they knew not which way to turn or what to do. Without Jesus, they were lost.

Many of us can relate to that situation. We gather regularly around God's immeasurable grace come to us in worship and scripture, prayer and fellowship – among those we shelter with and in expansive new ways online; God present with us in Christian Community – and yet being out on our own is a very different story. Trying to translate our Sunday Faith into Monday Living, we can become overwhelmed. In a non-sectarian, don't push your religious beliefs on me, carefully construed, boundary-laden work, learning and social environs, we don't always know what to do with faith, how to live out Christ's mission entrusted to us to be his witnesses. In that disjointed middle-place, with one foot in the Kingdom of God and the other firmly planted in the world, we find ourselves in a position not unlike the disciples before they returned from the Ascension event with such great joy.

With renewed confidence they were ready to be about the business of being and becoming the church. They would be the ones to demonstrate what it is like to live out the Gospel. And so when their beloved Lord was taken from them again, when the clouds received him, there was no sky gazing for them – at least not for long, their sights were locked firmly into serving Christ among his people. By their witness, the word would begin to spread in and around Jerusalem, and places like Arnold, Sweet Air, Mt. Airy, Bel Air, Frederick, Glen Burnie, Westminster, Ellicott City and South Baltimore and then finally to the far reaches of the ends of the earth, like Annapolis, Wilmington, Cumberland, Ocean City and the Eastern Shore.

Up until that Ascension moment, Jesus was seen only where he was, in and around the towns surrounding Galilee. Now, with his Ascension to sit at the right hand of the Father, Jesus was Lord of heaven and earth, present always, in all ways. In the Ascension, Jesus would no longer be confined to a single place or a single moment, but he would be alive in the Spirit to all people for all time. That sacred moment at Bethany opened the way for Christ's message to spread throughout the world forever, wherever people live in his Spirit even as the Spirit abides in us.

But where is his Body you ask, scanning the sky one last time. Luke, writing in Acts foresaw such a question, and so the angel says to the disciples, "Why are you standing there looking us to heaven? The body you are looking for is not there." For indeed, we are his

Body. Look in the mirror when you look for Christ, look as Luther says, in one another, and *be* little Christs' for one another. But know you are not Christ's Body alone, rather, *we* are the body of Christ, together.

We are Christ's Body, gathering week by week, around scripture in praise of one who is far above all the powers and principalities, and still alive among the weak, the poor, and the humble people of the world.

The Body gathered to eat at a table open to all, living out for all to taste and see the promise of thy Kingdom come on earth, perhaps even as it is in heaven.

The Body gathered to wash and anoint new members, bearing witness to the daily miracle and possibility of new birth, a second chance and living hope.

The Body gathered to celebrate the mystery of love between two become one, and seeing in their faithfulness, a strong echo of Christ's own faithfulness to us.

The Body gathered to forgive sins proclaiming the deeply subversive Good News: you are forgiven.

The Body gathered to lovingly care after its sick members, attempting to mirror, in our life together, God's own infinite compassion and mercy.

Even in death, The Body gathers to honor a life and tenderly honor the body that once served it.

The Body gathered, washed, fed and sent out by Christ in service to the world.

The Ascension teaches us that the work of Jesus – God's mission of love, compassion, justice, and healing - continues in the disciples. Indeed, the angel posed it well to them, "Why are you standing there, looking up to heaven?" It was a call not to stand still, but to go forth and be the church. Those early disciples had no idea how to do it, but they did.

This time of pandemic is our time to ascend into new ways of loving; into new practices of worship and prayer; and into new considerations for compassion and justice-making. Of course, we'll experience sadness and grief along the way, but Christ who once went before us, now in his ascension goes above us, walks beside us, lives within us, works through us to encourage and empower us to make a difference in a world that cries out for all that we've be blessed to go and share.

And so let us go boldly, to be the church, the body of Christ in the world, daily reclaiming our power to live in faith, act in love, and make Christ crucified, died, risen, ascended and alive among us still, to make Christ known in familiar and new ways.

Amen.

The Rev. William (Bill) Gohl, Jr., Bishop  
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