

**Luke 24:44-  
53**

44 Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while

I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of

Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.'

<sup>45</sup>Then he

opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to

them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah\* is to suffer and to rise from

the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins

is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from

Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses\* of these things. <sup>49</sup>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.'

50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he

blessed them. <sup>51</sup>While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them

and was carried up into heaven. \* <sup>52</sup>And they worshipped him,

and\* returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup>and they were continually

in the temple blessing God.\*

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Do you have an Ascension day tradition? A big family gathering?

A pilgrimage to a sacred spot? Maybe an exchange of Ascension day

gifts, or a favorite carol? No? Are you wondering what exactly I'm

talking about? Is the phrase "Ascension Day" a new one for you? A

colleague of mine, Rev. Erica Schemper describes it like this: "Its the

day when Christians remember that Jesus, after appearing to the

disciples post-resurrection, ascended into heaven ("and sits at the right

hand of God the Father..."). One meme going around the Churchy inter

webs says, "it's the day that Jesus started working from home." I love

that. Because, yes, a reminder that the same Jesus who walked with us

and was one of us is now at God's right hand speaking up and acting on

our behalf. Jesus who walked with us and was one of us is also the One

who is above all and in charge. And we don't have Jesus right beside us

physically now, but Jesus is above all and among all. Ascension is the

fulfillment, too, of that moment in the garden when Jesus says to Mary

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“don't cling to me.” We can't hang on to Jesus. He doesn't belong just

to us, our time and place. We can put Jesus in a box.”

This day is one that sometimes is overlooked. Because of the

timing, it often falls on Graduation Sunday, or Memorial Day weekend

as it does this year. It's one of what I might call the “minor big days” of

the year. However, it is an important part of our story as

followers of

Christ. This is the day we remember that Jesus did not physically stay

with us, that part of his ministry, and part of our faith is that he did

indeed go up to heaven. He ascended, just as he promised. In this

telling of the account, it is almost easy to miss it. Tucked into our

reading, it is described in one verse: <sup>51</sup>“While he was blessing them, he

withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.” That’s it. No

blinding whiteness, no dove sent from on high, no temple curtain torn

in two. He was here and then he was gone. And then the disciples had

to wait to see when the promise of the Holy Spirit would be fulfilled.

Jesus tells the disciples to stay in the city until the Holy Spirit comes. So

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after he ascends, they go back from Bethany to Jerusalem and worship

and praise as they are waiting.

We've done a lot of waiting lately. Waiting for things to reopen,

waiting for an Interim, waiting for life to go back to "normal". And it's

hard. When I talk to children during Advent, we talk about how hard it

is to wait for Christmas. That Advent is a special time of getting ready

for Jesus to be born. We count down weeks and days, we have a

specific end point to count down to. That makes it easier. But in this

case, we don't have an exact end. We can say here and now that Jesus

ascended 40 days after his resurrection, and then 10 days later the Holy

Spirit came on Pentecost. Yet, the disciples didn't know that Pentecost

was happening on Pentecost. They knew that Jesus had made a

promise to send an advocate, a comforter, "power from on high" to

clothe them. So they go back to the temple to wait, as they sing and

praise.

Jennifer Kaalund describes this time as a time of preparation. Did

you know that there is an optimum time to charge devices when you

first get them that enables them to maximize the life expectancy of a

battery? It's why we have to plug in phones and laptops and tablets to

fully charge before we use them the first time. And that waiting can be

so hard! We have something new and shiny that will make our lives

better and connect us to others and we have to wait for it to be ready

to use. If you use it before it's ready, you shorten the entire life

expectancy of the battery. So, she wonders if perhaps this period

between Ascension and Pentecost is similar to that initial charge. It is a

period of preparation that is necessary for the disciples to be fully ready

for the disciples to operate at optimal levels.

Maybe that is part of the purpose of this season. To think about

how we can prepare ourselves for what may be coming next?  
No, God

did not send Coronavirus to test us. Yes, we are begin tested,  
I'm not

denying that. I am wondering though, how we may be  
using this

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season in our own lives. Some of you are realizing in this  
season that

parenting and teaching is hard work. Some of you are enjoying  
more

time with immediate family. Some of you are struggling with  
isolation.

Some of us have experiences that we are still making sense  
of in our

day to day lives. How is God at work in all of  
this?

Rev. Schemper continued her thoughts from earlier:  
“That’s got

an extra layer in the midst of this strange time, too.  
Christians are

longing to get back to meeting in person, for many reasons.  
But a big

one? We believe that we, the community of believers are the  
Body of

Christ in the world. And it hurts to be severed from the  
members of

your body. But we can’t cling or put Jesus in a box. And so it’s  
faithful to

plug along and figure out how to do this differently in the  
time of

Corona. We can be the Body even with physical separation.  
We can

care for the body even when we are not right next to each  
other. We

can be the Body of Christ in the world in so many ways. Because  
Jesus is

above, among, bigger, and in control.”

6

I bristled this week when I wrote the words “re-opening task

force” on my calendar. You heard about that in the announcements.

But I hate the phrase “re-opening”. We never closed. The church did

not close. The buildings did, sure. However, the work of the church

never stopped. Not even for a millionth of a second. It has been 70

days since we last gathered for worship. The part of me that wants to

cling to Christ and keep him here on earth and keep everything the

same as it was grieves that number deeply. The part of me that is

excited about knowing that Jesus was not resurrected to remain on

earth is interested to see what happens as we continue to let Jesus out

of the box and see what happens next. 70 days ago we did not have a

clue how to have a virtual choir – now we do. 70 days ago we never

imagine serving people at Hope House as being picnics to go. We did

not imagine Stephen Ministers doing check ins via phone calls, and

pastoral care involving mask distribution and drive by parades. What I

find exciting is seeing how those of you with ideas of how we can

experience Jesus out of the box are coming forward and trying them.

As we continue to prepare and wait for the next phases, I

encourage each and every one of you to ask the question of “how am I

being the body of Christ in the world? How am I a part of the

community of believers, even when we cannot gather physically?” You

don’t have to answer it right now. As we note that this is the time

when we remember that Jesus always said he was not going to be with

us physically forever, we can remember that we are called to love and

serve in his name. As we wait for the arrival of the Holy Spirit, as we

wait for the arrival of our interim on June 1, as we wait for restrictions

to be lifted, and the body to one day regather, we also prepare for

these things. We recharge for new ways of being the church,  
and we

remember that Jesus is still at work. He ascended to Heaven,  
and sits

on the right hand of God. He's not here, but he has not  
stopped

working. And we can give thanks to God for  
that.

