

Rising

Ascension Sunday, May 16, 2021

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1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying^[a] 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; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ 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." ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward 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."

Christ, risen, from the dead and now, in this story from Luke's word in Acts, risen from the earth.

His is the only account of this transition, of how Jesus tells the disciples that they are to bear his message of redemption and forgiveness and will be his witnesses, clothed with power and then, ascends.

Let's remember where we started this Eastertide,
After his crucifixion, his followers were anguished, bewildered,
powerless.

Then they hear, or they see, of his resurrection. For those closest to him, who knew him as their friend and teacher, their idea of him has to change.

They loved him, his words, his healing power, his physical being.

We do too, so much that we carve and paint and cut glass into versions of his likeness of the most beautiful man we can imagine everywhere.

But, with resurrection, they and we are asked to take in another Jesus.

Through divine power, he breaks the boundary of life and death. It is not a return to life as before, like Lazarus but resurrected life, new life.

He breaks the boundary of space, moving thorough doors, appearing and vanishing from the sight.

And now, with ascension, the boundaries of his own personhood shift. Now Christ's existence is more than his own physical being on the earth.

All communities of faith, our existence, our identity, all those are now "in Christ".

Hear how the letter to the church at Ephesus describes it.

¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe,

Yes, the Divine Power of the Universe was made known in this human one who has been raised and made boundless, and now, you, this fragile little group of people, this community is going to have, energy, courage, imagination, Compassion Unbounded, because now we are In Christ.

As the sister of St. Francis, Teresa of Avila wrote in the 1500s:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks
Compassionately on the world
Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which Christ blesses the world.

This story is about Jesus, the Christ and it is about us:

Here is the Skit about the disciples looking up and waiting for Jesus

Over the past few months, we have shared our core values and had persons in the congregation bear witness to them:

We have heard from the broader community:
Seeking to be Christ in the world. From Nikki King shared her stories of challenging addiction in rural America inviting us to live into hope.

Chad Hale shared his life in community with those at the margins in Atlanta, inviting us to be church, perfect in compassion and community.

Val and Hope told their stories of women coming home from prison and the Welcome Home community began meeting here.

Emily from the United Methodist Children's Home shared how the power of love claims foster children and their parents.

And some other voices have been heard right around our church inviting us to be Christ's hands and feet.

Spencer, who has lived outside for a long time, Val, who just lost his home and has been sleeping here.

And a group of church folks here have begun to gather with those who work with these communities to imagine a shared ministry right here.

A family called a few weeks ago and asked if this room could be the gathering place for the family of a young woman, Jenna, and a devastated LGBTQ community remembered her life gone too soon.

And we did so this past Monday, and now members of this congregation who counsel young adults are ready to consider, how we come alongside young people and families as they struggle to have hope.

Cathy has gathered others to dream and plan the creation of a prayer labyrinth in which all persons, regardless of station or status can come and walk a winding path that helps them and be empowered.

We are working on our stewardship, our endowment, our choir loft, our outreach. We have prayer teams and Easter Egg Hunts and mission trip to southern Ohio. And now youth are preparing for Pentecost Sunday and so much more.

It can seem overwhelming, what we are attempting. All of us, the church of Jesus Christ in every place, including Jerusalem and the West Bank. *Imagine that work of redemption and forgiveness that is to be done by all God's people there.*

But remember where we started, a small group of bewildered, bereft people to whom the power of God to resurrect was revealed. To whom the risen Christ who breaks through every barrier of space and time was made known, and whose Spirit invites and empowers us still to be the church. *Ekklesia: called out and called together in Christ's name to become Christ's home in the world.*

And so we are and shall be, Amen.