

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
Barboursville, West Virginia
May 24, 2020
Ascension of the Lord

Call to Worship Revelation 5:13

Then I heard every creature in heaven
and on the earth and under the earth
and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

**To the one seated on the throne
and to the Lamb,
be blessing and honor and glory and might
forever and ever!**

Prayer of the Day

**God of heaven and earth,
We rejoice today before the throne of Christ's power and peace,
for he has put down tyrannies that would destroy us,
and unmasked idols claiming our allegiance.
We thank you that he alone is Lord of our lives.
by your Spirit,
give us freedom to love with his love,
and to embrace the world with his compassion.
Accept the offering of our lives,
that we may obey your commands to witness and serve.
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Hymn Lift High the Cross

George William Kitchen; Michael Robert Newbolt, Sydney Hugo Nicholson

Glory to God, Westminster John Knox Press

Refrain

Lift high the cross, the cross of Christ proclaim,
til all the world adore his sacred name.
Come, Christians follow where our Savior trod,
the Lamb victorious, Christ, the Son of God. *Refrain*

All newborn servants of the Crucified
bear on their brow the seal of Christ who died. *Refrain*

O Lord, once lifted, on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally. *Refrain*

So shall our song of triumph ever be:
praise to the Crucified for victory. *Refrain*

Scripture Reading Luke 24:44-53

The Word Proclaimed

I'm not a very quantitative person, but I think it's safe to estimate that approximately none of us has witnessed a person being taken up from earth into the clouds and vanishing from sight to be transported to the right hand of God.

Which presented me with a problem this week as I considered the message I would share with you. I stumbled around my theological attic a bit until I learned that an extended family member had just that day been delivered to the entrance of a local hospital by family members, to have joint replacement surgery. No one was permitted to accompany him. I wondered how that felt on both sides of that event. What does it feel like to be a patient, or to face surgery alone, and what does it feel like to drop off a loved one and see the doors close behind him, shutting them out. When would they see each other again? Would they see each other again? I know many of you have experienced this same thing recently.

And then I remembered how this scripture text connects to our life and faith.

Since Advent and Christmas, I have been thinking a lot about the nature of Jesus, fully God and fully human. We celebrate his humble birth at Christmas. This is Emmanuel, God with us, a baby like we once were, who would grow and learn and experience the full range of human life. We call that "low Christology."

Here, in his ascension, we witness his divinity. Though he was born like us, he ascends to heaven, unlike us. This is high Christology. In my preparation, I was getting stuck in how we could relate to the divinity of Jesus, when all around me, and indeed, around all of us, are testimonies of his humanity, his presence with us in this time that has brought separation, mortal threat, fear, and a real "cloud of unknowing."

This is a very disquieting and discomfoting time. We may not want to acknowledge it. We were raised on rugged individualism here in the mountain state. We're strong and sturdy and nothing can shake us or shake our faith.

So, dear friends, why did we strip bare the grocery shelves and fight over toilet paper? Oh, we can justify it. We needed to be prepared. I said that, too. Why? Because we had been plunged

into a disaster we hadn't anticipated. We were not in control. So, we took control in whatever way we could. This is human nature.

Several weeks later, we are in a different place. We are making plans to return to church and other gatherings. We are thinking about going out to lunch or shopping at the mall for the first time in months. Maybe we will even dare to make vacation plans. I can hear the beach calling my name.

But, in our efforts to get back to life as we knew it, let's think of how we have been changed...for the better.

I think one of the most important lessons we will have learned as we emerge from this Covid 19 era, is that the last time we kissed a loved one good-bye, hung up the phone, turned in an assignment, borrowed sugar from our neighbor...may well be the last time we see that person for awhile. And, those precious moments, that we probably took for granted because we couldn't anticipate how the pandemic would interrupt life, may have been the last time we will be with that person this side of heaven.

And that is sobering.

The story of Jesus' ascension is repeated in the book of Acts, which is also attributed to the writer of Luke's gospel. In the Acts account, as Jesus disappears, a couple of angels appear to the disciples. Now, usually when angels show up in scripture, they say, "Fear not!" That's the first message.

Not here. In this text, the angels ask the disciples why they were standing still, staring at the sky. And in the Luke text, Jesus gives them their job description: repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in Jesus' name to all the world, beginning at home right there in Jerusalem.

If we take these two accounts together, we might interpret the message to be:

"Shake a leg, people! There's work to do. You will miss Jesus. You will grieve his loss. Do something with what Jesus taught you. Love people. Forgive offenses. Show people the abundant life that results from turning away from sin and turning toward God.

And, that's what I would offer to all of you who have seen a teacher for the last time, or a classmate, or a neighbor, or a loved one. Do something with what he or she taught you. It will be a tribute to their life and give purpose to yours.

Pastoral Prayer Including the Lord's Prayer

God of Goodness, grace, and love,

like the Apostles, we stand looking toward the sky,
not fully understanding all that this day means.
We fail to grasp the wonder of your ascension.
Forgive the smallness of our vision,
the narrowness of our outlook,
the weakness of our love,
the nervousness of our witness,
our repeated failure to recognize
the fullness of your revelation in Christ.
Give us a deeper sense of wonder,
a stronger faith,
and a greater understanding of all you have done for us.
We have many concerns on our hearts today and we lift now the names of those in need...
...the sick, those in the midst of treatment, the recovering, their families and caregivers;
the lost, the lonely, the confused, and the forgotten;
those in the halls of government, boards of educations, and all public servants;
for those who are returning to work and those who must now search for it;
for all those who are given charge of family and loved ones;
give us your strength, wisdom, and love that we may care for them as you have cared for us.
We pray in the way Jesus taught us saying, **Our Father...Amen.**

Blessing

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the King of glory,
give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation
that makes God known to you.
May the eyes of your heart have enough light to see
what is the hope of God's call,
what is the richness of God's glorious inheritance among believers,
and what is the overwhelming greatness of God's power
that is at work among us. Amen.

Next week is Pentecost, the day we traditionally celebrate as the Birthday of the Christian Church. The church will be clothed in red. You may choose to do the same in celebration.