

**Sermon for Ascension Day ~ Year C**  
Trinity Episcopal Church in Lawrence, Kansas  
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Perhaps the reason the Church has neglected the Ascension in its preaching, teaching, and liturgical life is that it is so easy to let issues such as the location of heaven, behavior of clouds, and laws of gravity obscure the central theological affirmations of the event. I invite you to look beyond the literal description of the event with me tonight and consider those affirmations.

**The first affirmation is that it rings the curtain down on the earthly ministry of Jesus.**

He had walked with them and talked with them about the Kingdom before and after the resurrection. He had walked the way of the cross. He had journeyed with them along the road to Emmaus and appeared to them in the breaking of the bread. He stood among them in that fear-filled room in Jerusalem and restored their courage and their faith. For forty days he had shared with them his risen presence. He had prepared them for his going away and promised them that he would send the Comforter, power from on high, and that because he was going to the Father, they would be able to do even greater works than he had done. Now it was time for the earthly part of his ministry to cease.

The Ascension was a farewell scene. They needed a transition and this was the event that made it possible. We know the need ourselves.

His departure points to a new day in the Kingdom, a new relationship with his followers, and a new responsibility for his work.

So, the Ascension affirms that his earthly ministry has come to a close and his work in the world is now to be done by those whom he has chosen and empowered.

**A second affirmation of the Ascension is a broadening understanding of the purpose and mission of the Church.**

The figure in white asked them, “Why are you standing there looking up into heaven?” That may be another way of saying, “You have been told what you are supposed to do and it is NOT to stand there looking up into the sky. Jesus told you he’ll return but he didn’t give you a schedule. You have things to do. God and do them!”

The challenge to the Church now as then is, while we expect his return at any moment, we are not to spend our waiting time looking up into the sky and meditating on the past but moving into mission in the world.

Theologian Leslie Newbigin once observed, “The Church is unique in that it exists not for its own sake but for the sake of those outside it.”

We are not to become so caught up in gazing in wonder that we fail to capture the vision of the mission field at the doorsteps of our churches into which we are sent at the end of every service. We must not be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good in advancing the reign of God in our part of the world!

**The third affirmation of the Ascension is that Jesus, the suffering and crucified One, is now with the Father.**

What does that mean? I am reminded of Luther's debate with Zwingli during which Zwingli was challenging Luther's perspective on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Zwingli declared, "He can't be in two places at once, and the scripture says he's at the right hand of God." Luther responded, "The right hand of God is here, there, and everywhere."

The right hand of God is not a geographical location you can Google, but rather the power bestowed upon the Son by the Father. He brings God's power to us.

It means that the One who has been given all power and authority has been touched with the feeling of weakness, knows our pain, has wrestled with temptation. A little girl stood looking at a stained glass interpretation of the Ascension. In surprise, she said, "Look, the print of the nails is still in his hands and feet!" His incarnation, which began with his Nativity and concluded with his Ascension, has brought something of our humanity into the very life of God.

It means that he is Lord of the Universe. All that is left is for the universe to acknowledge that truth.

And, it means that the ultimate outcome of history is no longer in question. The Kingdom, the power, and the glory are his now and forever. He has triumphed and, we who are his sisters and brothers through Baptism are heirs of all that he has won. His victory is our victory. You might say that his victory is hidden in our history, to be perceived only through eyes of faith. What do you see when you look around? Look again!

In the Letter to the Ephesians, we are told that the world should be able to get a glimpse of it when it looks at the Church, his Body. We have to confess that is not always what the world sees. It's not always what we see either. But he's probably doing more with us than he's getting done with any other group on this planet. The Church is still alive and at work in human lives, bringing compassion, healing, purpose, and victory to people of all types in all places.