

Ascension A (Acts 1:1-11) (Ephesians 1:17-23) (Matt 28:16-20)

A few years ago, when it was safe to be in Israel, I was privileged to visit the place where it is said Jesus ascended to his Father. It's a dumpy place with a dingy little building guarded by a few Moslem watchmen. I was sadly disappointed. When we hear the readings of this day, we may visualize a place of great splendor, a magnificent temple as a memorial of the event where Jesus ascended to reign in glory at the right hand of his Father.

Let's take a close look at this event as described in today's readings. The apostles are gathered on the mountain. Jesus tells them he will send his Holy Spirit. They know he is about to leave them, and yet they ask a dumb question, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They still don't get it after spending three years with Jesus. And so he tells them patiently that he will send his Holy Spirit and then they will get it. How patient Jesus is. And then the two men in white garments, angels of course, ask them why they are standing around looking up at the sky. Understanding will come at Pentecost. How like us are these apostles. We often don't get it, and we stand around looking up at the sky, in our confusion and lack of faith.

And so we listen to the prayerful hymn of Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. "May the Spirit of wisdom give us knowledge of the Father of the Lord Jesus, and of his passionate love for us. May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened so that we may know the hope to which we have been called. May we know the riches of our inheritance as God's holy ones, and the power that has been given to us who believe in the one who has ascended to be seated in power at the right hand of the loving Father, above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, in this age and in the age to come. All things are beneath his feet, for he is head of the Church, his body, and he fills us in every way, for Jesus is Lord."

And what is Jesus Lord of? He is Lord over life and death, for death bears no more power or fear for us who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is Lord over success or failure, over war and peace, over sickness and health, over addictions, and divorces and ruptures of relationships. He is Lord over parenting and hopelessness and despair. He is Lord over all that pulls us down and diminishes us and dehumanizes us. The Lordship of Jesus finds its power in love, the passionate love he has for each one of us, the love that heals and gives life. This is the love he offers to each one of us, the love he asks us to share with each other, as we reach out to others who like the apostles still don't get it and stand gazing up hopelessly into the sky. And today we give thanks for the presence of Jesus who is Lord over our hopelessness, the one who is way, truth, and life.

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