
WORD MADE FLESH

Ascension of the Lord

Acts 1:1-11; Hebrews 9:24-28,10:19-23; Luke 24:46-53

A Call to Presence*

The feast of Ascension calls us to consider the meaning of Christ's dwelling in the fullness of the kingdom. It's abiding message however, is about our vocation, "that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name." Ascension focuses on living the resurrected life, a life that embodies and proclaims the kingdom of God, a life restored to the ebb and flow of repentance and forgiveness.

None of the texts for this great feast in the life of the church draw our attention to the miraculous journey of the resurrected Jesus to a heavenly land. Rather, they all galvanize our thought and understanding through Christ's departure from the earthly journey to be present with the Father, on the meaning of our life when it is lived in the presence of the kingdom of God.

To live the presence of the kingdom is to live open to repentance and cultivating the disposition of forgiveness.

The life of anticipation that has characterized so much of the history of the Christian community, a life waiting upon for the coming of the heavenly kingdom, has been prefaced on the texts we read today. But what do they actually proclaim? Far from suggesting we should be preoccupied with the next life they invite us, as Jesus in the text, to enter into the kingdom now. These texts call us to live out of the resurrection and respond to the world with the loving forgiveness that flows from the resurrection. That forgiveness can only flow from us if we have repented deeply and constantly of our own missing of the mark of life. That is what the Epistle reading for today means by that wonderful phrase, the "pure heart." Purity is the open space within us that makes it possible to greet the world with equanimity and hear the yearning of the human heart in the midst of sorrows and joys. Purity is a landscape far more than a condition. It is precisely this type of landscape that is prepared when we are opened and claimed by the resurrected life. And, it is the perspective of Ascension, the Divine view of things, or, as the scripture makes so clear, the view from out of the heart of the kingdom of God that is proclaimed in today's readings.

Today we are encourage to attend to the "one who will come"; to the Holy Spirit, which will be sent as our comforter to help us discern the spirit of God in the human journey. To be in the kingdom of God is to discern the Divine way of seeing, to nurture the life that is struggling to be born in the situation that appears for all the world as a sea of despair and anguish. Having received the Spirit, the Christian lives in the kingdom of discernment and calls forth only that which is life giving in our broken world. This is the resurrected life, the perspective of the feast of the Ascension.

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