
WORD MADE FLESH

Ascension of the Lord From the Throne of Grace *

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

The readings today are a paean to the spiritual journey Christ calls us to take. For this reason, these scripture passages are often used against the Gospel's call for transformation and used instead as a bulwark for the use of authority and power over human beings. Where the ego and self-interest of human beings is most deeply challenged by scripture, the scripture is most often used precisely to affirm unexamined pride and, thus, to invert the Gospel.

These texts are all a kind of vesper for Pentecost, preparing us to welcome the Holy Spirit and the restoration, the making new, of all creation.

The disciples, from Resurrection to Ascension, were struggling to understand Christ's Gospel. Virtually all their encounters with Christ during this period show the various ways they (and us) misunderstand the Gospel. The Apostle, in his letter to Theophilus, speaks of Christ's teaching about the kingdom of God. Despite friendship, miracle, and the resurrection, the disciples inquire again about the restoration of a political kingdom. We all long for the perfect authority to rule our world and free us from being the body of Christ, from doing the works of mercy, from making present the kingdom of love. Christ's last words enjoins the disciples to be witnesses to the kingdom and assures them that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the power and authority which transforms one's heart and mind and makes it possible to live the kingdom life, a life of loving communion.

This is the transformation that the Apostle Paul prays may come upon the fledgling sojourners he writes to in the letter to the Ephesians. He prays that the Father of glory may give (that we may be open and receive) "a spirit of wisdom", of divine love, so that the "eyes of your heart" may be enlightened. When we see the world and the whole of the human family with the eye of the heart as God sees, we are transformed: We know "the hope to which" we are called, so we have the confidence God has in the struggles of life knowing that, however they may appear, these struggles are the broken longing for communion and love; we are open to the "riches of his glorious inheritance"- because we are empty of our self-made fears and desires, we are able to be attentive to what is given; we use the "immeasurable greatness of his power", the power of love, to call forth life from all the death dealing that colours and shapes human experience, and thus, restore Life to life in the world.

The Apostle tells us, as he did the community at Ephesus, that we are the body and presence of Christ in the world. We are to bless, to heal, to call forth life from death, and to restore God's creation to herself. The Great Commission given to the eleven disciples on the mountain in Galilee -and to you and me- in today's Gospel, is the fruit of the transformation. Rather than a call to arms for Christian soldiers, warping their fears and desires in religious values, it is calling those, freed from desire and fear and empty of self-interest, to proclaim the Gospel of life. With our hope and confidence in life restored, the Great

Commission calls us to discern in all the struggles of life the longing for communion and love, to be attentive to the grace bearing nature of what is given in life, and to exercise the only power Christ ever spoke of, the power to call forth life from all the death dealing thoughts and actions of our daily world.

Christ's Gospel is simple. The Creator of all that is loves life and wants no one to live in the land of death. On this, the feast of Ascension, we are all called to see creation from the throne of grace.

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