

Feast of the Ascension - May 26, 2022

"The Church Grows Up"

ST. THOMAS' EPISCOPAL CHURCH

ST. PETERSBURG, FL

Acts 1: 1-11 • Psalm 47 • Ephesians 1: 15-23 • Luke 24: 44-53



Ascensiontide, this little ten day period in the church's calendar between now and the Day of Pentecost, is really a liminal space. It sits in and on both sides of a boundary that you may or may not even feel. For most churches, in most years, Ascension rarely even gets acknowledged, and that's a shame, not just because it's commended to us by the Prayer Book as a principal feast day of the Church year, but also because, if we let them, the emotions and thoughts that Ascension can provoke in us are really important ones for our growth as Christians. So, as a way of getting at the way this time is able to make us feel, if we let it, I want to invite you to think of a truly liminal time in your own life. When was it that you felt both empowered and arrived, while simultaneously feeling confused and maybe a little scared? When was it you felt like your life was now and not yet?

For me, one of those times in my life was when I began college. Maybe it was not even that whole first semester. Maybe it was really just for a month or so. It was a relatively short time, nonetheless, and a very, very strange one. I had graduated high school and was on top of the world. You might remember a similar feeling: the excitement, the thrill, the sense of accomplishment and the incredible exhalation that left you as light as a feather. But then I got to college and it was a whole new ball game. I went to school out of state and did not know many people. I had graduated high school and so, at least in the eyes of some, I was a competent person, but as soon as college began I didn't feel that way. I felt alone, confused, even scared. Sure, I knew how to go through the motions. I did not struggle to get myself to class, nor did I struggle to meet friendly people and find social connections. But at the same time I wondered if this was who I really was. I simultaneously knew what I was doing because I had been trained and prepared well, and didn't know a thing because it felt like the guide rails had been removed. I was suddenly bowling without the bumpers. Now maybe the college experience wasn't like this for you, but I'm guessing there was a time in your life, sometime, that was. That's the feeling Ascensiontide should give us.

On the day of the Ascension, Jesus left this world. There's a few other ways to say that. Two years ago the way we said it was on the day of Ascension, Jesus began to work from home. Another way to say it, from the perspective of the disciples, is that on the Day of Ascension, Jesus left his friends immediately after saying he would be with them to the end of the age. After they got over the initial shock, they were in that liminal space. The source of their authority on earth, Jesus who had risen from the dead, was gone. They knew what to do, for he had told them and shown them, but they weren't real sure they could do it on their own just yet. The new source of their authority, the Holy Spirit, had not yet come. And so they found themselves in this weird, gray, time out of time liminal space. While it probably shouldn't terrify you, it should give you pause.

This was like the last day of classes for those disciples; commencement would come on Pentecost. But this was the beginning of the time in which they had to think about what do we do next. How do we continue in the way Jesus has shown us to go? How do we become the Church? And what kind of church do we become? As we dwell in this Ascensio[n]tide, we would do well to ask ourselves the same questions. Who do we as a church want to grow up to be? Now, on the one hand, that's a strange thing to ask a church that is turning

seventy, but on the other hand, as we come out of our covid shells, it's the perfect time to be asking that question.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians gives us a really good answer. It's tempting, especially in the age of social media, to want people to know about our church because of the great events we put on, or because of Benison Farm, or because of our involvement with Pack a Snack, or because of our beautiful Sunday services. Just look at all these great picture of smiling people on our Facebook page! That's the temptation. The real answer is what Paul says to the Ephesians: "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints." That's the kind of church we actually want to grow up to be, the kind of church that when people show up here for the first time and we ask them, "How did you hear about us," they reply, "Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints." As we dwell in this slightly scary liminal time between Christ ascending to his Father and us receiving the Holy Spirit, let us spend this time asking ourselves how we grow up to be that kind of church. Then, as we live into that, as we start going through the motions, we'll discover that we really have been trained well for the building of the kingdom, we'll

discover that we actually do know what we're doing after all because we'll be doing exactly as Jesus taught us. And when we do that, people will recognize it.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Amen.