

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

Sunday After Ascension Day 2023.

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“While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven.”

St. Luke 24: 51

Jesus Christ rose on the third day of his death, appearing the apostles and other disciples, men and women, before returning to the heavenly realms. The Church observes Christ’s return to heaven – called “Ascension Day” – on the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Christ’s resurrection, which fell on May 18 this year. However, since Sunday (the day of Jesus’ resurrection) is the main day for worship for Christians, among Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and others, “Ascension Day” is sometimes transferred to today – the following Sunday...

We use the word “ascension” because we often have this sense or association that heaven is “up there” – above us. But let’s remember that “heaven” is not a location in *space* – 1km above the earth; or 1000 or a million km above the earth. Heaven is not a physical location in our universe; it is the perfect state of the soul with God...

Some of us might have heard of the Medieval poet Dante Alighieri, who is best known for his insights about the nature of hell – of terrible self-separation from the living God. But in his trilogy *The Divine Comedy*, Dante puts in the form of poetry the beauty of *heaven* – of the wonderful between the God of glory and all the faithful through time! These are some of his words in English translation:

For God’s rays penetrate with shafts so keen  
Through all the universe, in due degree,  
There’s naught can parry them or intervene.

Drawn fro the new age and antiquity,  
This realm of saints, whose joy no dangers mar,  
Gazed on one sign in love and unity.

O trinal light, which shining as one star  
It fills them with delight to gaze on there,  
Look down on us, storm-driven as we are!

(*Paradiso*, Canto 31, vv. 22-30)

This poem is a hint, of the glorious beauty and wonder of heaven. Once again: Heaven is the perfect state of human souls in union with the glorious God, the Creator and Redeemer of the whole created order...

So Jesus Christ is in heaven – risen, ascended, glorified. In his mercy beyond words, he continues to pray for you and for me, and for all the broken world for whom he, the Son of God, gave his life perfectly...

Why do we take time today to remember Christ's ascension? To be direct, what difference does Christ's ascension make to us?...

I suggest there are 3 significant facts about the glorious ascension of Jesus Christ. First: Christ's ascension reminds us to raise our eyes from the broken and the hurting, to be mended and healed... The world is in a troubled state right now; it's easy just to focus on what is *wrong* with the world. But Christ's ascension reminds us that brokenness and sin is *not* the end of God's story! We are being raised up; transformed; made spiritually free! Brokenness and sin is not God's story. God's purpose for the whole world is to raise us to inherit his glory...

Yes; we have to deal with the troubles in the world, and the "sin which clings so closely." But that's not where our eyes are to remain. By the grace of God, our destiny is to be healed and perfectly united in the embrace of God, who will never let us go. Remembering Christ's ascension points us to God's glory...

Second, Christ's ascension leads us to praise: We see the Son of God as he truly is, in perfect union with his Spirit and his heavenly Father. Our natural response is to be bursting with praise – to this wonderful God who in his created power, made creatures such as us to enjoy his divine love. We're designed to give praise to God, as we recognize Christ, and all that he has done for humanity...

First, we're called to raise our eyes, above the world's troubles. Second, we're led to praise... Third, we can appreciate that by the grace of God, you and I – little old you and I – will be with the great heroes of the faith, past and present, in the love and life of God. We didn't earn it. We don't deserve it. But the love between a healthy parent and a wayward child is a tiny glimpse of the unconditional love which God has for all people. By God's grace -- his un-earned favour toward us -- one glorious day, God will bring you and me and all the faithful, to be with him forever. The third point of remember the Ascension is that *you and I* will belong...

There's something to clear up here: There are some devout Christians who are hesitant to imagine that they will definitely be included in God's perfect state of heaven. You might hear people say something like this: "I hope I'll go to heaven." Maybe they don't want to presume God's judgement. Or they might even say, "I've been a pretty good person" – but we don't earn our status in heaven by being good, because none of us is good enough! Our confidence is not in *our* efforts. Instead, we are resting our hope on the goodness and mercy of our amazing God. We called to trust God, that he is good. And if we trust God, we don't need to worry that we will ever be outside his redeeming love...

We get our teaching, our doctrine, from how we pray. The Kenyan Anglican liturgy, which we use about monthly here, says it well. In one phrase, we read that we are “not presuming, but assured.” “Not presuming, but assured.” This is called the doctrine, or teaching of “Assurance...”

We trust God, and so we can be *assured* that we will be included, along with the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Brice, and all the saints; with the apostles and martyrs; with countless ordinary people of faith (who really aren't ordinary after all); with the dear family members who have gone before us, and who helped us know Christ's love – all of us together. Christ's destiny in heaven is ours too, by faith. We belong to the new Jerusalem – that great heavenly city that no one can count. St. John records,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away.’ (Revelation 21: 3-4)

Alleluia! Amen.