

Ascension Day, 29 May 2025

Readings: Acts 1:1-11, Psalm 47, Ephesians 1:15-end, Luke 24:44-end

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

This morning I will begin with a story from the Old Testament. It is a story about two brothers Esau and Jacob. Esau was the older brother and so had a special birthright. In Jewish tradition this birthright allowed him to have extensive benefits accruing from the family inheritance. Jacob was the younger brother. One day while Jacob was cooking a stew Esau came home from hunting. Esau was very hungry and asked Jacob for food. But Jacob did not want to give him the stew for free. Jacob asked Esau to sell him his birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew and Esau accepted! The story continues with Jacob taking the place of Esau as the firstborn, the conflict between the brothers and later reconciliation. All of it began with a bowl of stew. Let me now make a connection between this story and today's Feast of the Ascension.

One perspective on the Ascension is to say that it is a moment in Christian history where Jesus shows us our real destination. Jesus was concerned about our wellbeing in this world. He healed many, he provided food and he taught many things to help us, his friends, enjoy this life more fully. But Jesus also had a vision for us. He showed us many times that this life is real, yes, but that the kingdom of God transcending time and space is even more real.

How many times do we find ourselves possessed by the business and the worries of life? Are our worries and problems and pains real? Yes they are of course! Through the Ascension Jesus shows us that we are destined for life with God in eternity and that this life with God is real even if we don't see it. Using a funny way of speaking about this reality we all have different passports in this community, British, Austrian, Canadian, Sri Lankan, Nigerian, Italian and so on, but Jesus shows us in the Ascension, that our common passport is really for the kingdom of God. We all have a passport for the Kingdom of God. If we are going to use this passport or not... well, that will be the topic of another sermon...

Returning to our citizenship looking up as Jesus ascends are we supposed to forget our lives? The bills to pay are real, sickness is real, arguments with a partner are real and so on. So the Ascension is not about forgetting our present, for a future in heaven. God knows we still need him

in our lives, in every moment, at our side, and also that we need each other's help and love. The Ascension is not about forgetting. It is about looking further. It is about making our perspective larger. It is about opening our eyes wider.

Even though we are Christians many it seem live daily life as if it were the only real one. We act like Esau as in the story at the beginning of the sermon. We exchange our birthright as children of God for a bowl of stew for the satisfaction of some present day and immediate necessities forgetting about the rest of the bigger story in which our lives are set. Esau had to eat, but what was the cost? Was the meal worth forfeiting his birthright? I think not. So one really important question to ask ourselves is, how do we make choices? Do we make our choices following Esau's example, or are we able to look up and around us and see life with the eyes of God? Again it is not about forgetting, but about seeing the bigger picture.

The Ascension reminds us of our citizenship in God - this will be our ultimate destination. And to make choices we must be conscious of this special citizenship. How does this special relationship change our lives? What follows is one example.

Let us suppose that a relationship very dear to us with a friend, a partner, a child, for one reason or another, is broken or ends. The natural reaction could be anger, or desperation, or resentment. And this is totally acceptable - we are humans! But what changes if we are conscious of our citizenship in God? Does our citizenship in God change things? Yes, of course it does. First of all we trust that God is present with us, suffers with us, and with the other person as well. We also become conscious of another dimension of life knowing that there are many other people who love us. Who has failed to notice how much love is around in a time of need? If we are stuck in our own little reality, we might not see that.

And if our minds are conscious of a higher perspective, we are more able to see ourselves, so to say, from the outside, and the others as well. We might even discover what is causing the pain, see more clearly our own actions and the actions of the other person. With God's help and with a God informed perspective we might find ways to heal.

Let me clarify this image lest I be misunderstood. If I pick up a stone on the moon, or if I pick up the same stone on the earth, this same stone will have a different density or weight for me. Same stone, different density and a different energy will be needed for me to lift it up. This is because

of gravity, as we know. But in a spiritual way, this is what happens when we are conscious of the reality of God. The same problem, or life event, has a different “density or weight”, symbolically speaking. It still has a weight, but it is lighter!

We often forget about God and we need to keep reminding ourselves of the reality of God because the way the world works is really making it hard for us to see beyond this life. Jesus showed us how to keep in touch with God, that is, by prayer. I know that, for at least some of us, it is difficult to make time for prayer or to find the energy, or we do not know how to pray. It is a struggle! But here is a possibility. We are probably better off starting small, one minute a day. Taking a deep breath while sitting in a train, or before getting out of or into bed. Then one minute can become two minutes of prayer and so on. What should we say in prayer?

I don't know, this is very personal, but if we don't know where to begin, we can try uniting our prayer with the prayer of the angels in heaven and say again and again and again: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forever, glory and thanks to God for the gift of life and for being wondrously made precious in God's sight. **Amen!**