

Sermon - 05-16-21
Ps 47; Acts 1:1-11; Eph 1:15-23; Lu 24:44-53
Ascension of the Lord

Christ's Kingdom – sometimes called heaven – is not beyond the stars – out there or up there. No, as NT Wright has said, “Heaven is God's space, which intersects with our space but transcends it. It is, if you like, a further dimension of our world, not a place far removed at one extreme of our world.” (*Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, Eerdmans, 1995)

Christ's Kingdom is very near. Christians who have given any thought to where Jesus is embrace His closeness, His interest in our well-being, His very **presence**. I will go so far as to say that it is only human rebellion that keeps this Savior of ours invisible – His Kingdom undetected by so many. It is due to our hardness of heart.

We can see the presence of God every day in acts of kindness and generosity. We see God's fingerprints all over the beauty of our natural setting – the blossoms, the clouds, the smiles and laughter of children.

Hear and acknowledge and believe the Biblical witness that Jesus retreated out of the disciples' view. He was here – and then He was no longer seen. In our time we are learning that there are possibly many, many dimensions coexisting and overlapping even as we sit here solidly upon our seats – seeing and hearing one another and the music and the birds and the traffic outside, and all that is going on. We wait for the day when this Savior of ours is fully revealed – the day when heaven comes to earth with the angel shout and the sounding of the trumpet. We continually pray that His will is done “on earth as it is in heaven.”

The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Ephesus that he is praying for them. That is always an encouraging word – even to the materialist or atheist. The church is constantly receiving thank-yous for our prayers. People are always asking us for prayer. We are called to remain faithful in praying. Something much greater than you know is being accomplished when you pray. Paul's prayer comes to us as an encouragement that “the eyes of **our** heart will be enlightened.” (v 18) Today, I hear again the apostle's prayer with every hope that you and I are given “the riches of His glorious inheritance among the saints.” Our inheritance is not the material gain of this world. It is not power – it is not wealth – nor property – nor gold nor jewels. It is that we are Christ's body. That we inherit the miracle of resurrection.

Jesus was fully human – vulnerable to being pierced and wounded and killed by hanging on a cross. Just like us. We are fragile and subject to mortal destruction. Death awaits this flesh as it is. But God decided in His sovereign power to bring **to Himself** a mortal human being – once destroyed and utterly dead – into His very presence **alive**. That is, Jesus. In rising from the tomb – and then entering God's unveiled presence, Jesus is the first mortal to live in the kingdom of God – the heavenly places, if you will – in a glorified body – in the flesh.

This is your inheritance! Take it – it's yours. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God...*” (Eph 2:8)

I believe everyone in this room knows what it is like to wait for something. Maybe you are waiting for Christmas – or just waiting for this sermon to end. But, among us are those who have endured loss – death of a loved one, loss of job or home or both. Many have waited for a baby to be born – or watched and waited while a loved one moves beyond recognition into dementia or Alzheimer's – or escapes us by passing away from a terminal illness. We wait for the United Methodist Church to get off its good intentions and move.

We stand today with the disciples, looking into the clouds. We are in a state of waiting. We are in the interim – which the disciples, and even the whole world, entered when Jesus disappeared from view. They were waiting for His return – and now we are waiting for His return. It was already the “last days” when Jesus was born. He entered the world mysteriously, conceived by divine means. After thirty-three years of mortal life, He departed just as mysteriously. The long-awaited Messiah came quickly – and just as quickly departed.

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We have the witness of the Gospel writers and the Apostles Paul, Peter, James and John, that Jesus walked in the world in His resurrected body before He rose in plain sight of the disciples and disappeared. Even the youngest Christian knows that He is not gone. And He is not forgotten. "I serve a Risen Savior! He's in the world today. I know that He is living, whatever people say. I see His hand of mercy. I hear His voice of cheer and just the time I need Him He's always near... He lives! He lives – Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart. You ask me how I know He lives. He lives within my heart."

We hope in His return. May we live as though He has stepped into the next room, saying, "I'll be right back." With Him a thousand years is like a day – and a day is like a thousand years. Amen.