

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION
May 16, 2021
Holy Trinity Anglican Church
Reverend Michael Fleming

Celebrant: The parishes of the Diocese of Ottawa sit on the unceded territory of the Algonquin nation.
All: **May we live together in harmony and peace.**

Celebrant: Alleluia! Christ is risen.
All: **The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**
Celebrant: May his grace and peace be with you.
All: **And also with you.**

Celebrant: Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord. Keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of his peace, and bring the whole of creation to worship at his feet, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen

The First Reading is from the book of Acts, Chapter 1, Verses 1 to 11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”
He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Psalm 47

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with a cry of joy.

For the Lord Most High is to be feared; he is the great king over all the earth.

He subdues the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet.

He chooses our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves.

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of the ram's-horn.

Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our king, sing praises.

For God is king of all the earth; sing praises with all your skill.

God reigns over the nations; God sits upon his holy throne.

The nobles of the peoples have gathered together with the people of the God of Abraham.

The rulers of the earth belong to God, and he is highly exalted.

The Second Reading is from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, Chapter 1, Verses 15 to 23

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

Celebrant: The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to the blessed St. Luke Chapter 24: Verses 36-53

All: **Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

The Gospel of Christ.

Praise to you Lord, Jesus Christ

The Homily - *GO AND TELL EVERYONE* - The Feast of the Ascension

Nestled between the wondrous news brought by Mary of Madgala to the broken community and the incredible gifting of the Holy Spirit on that community at Pentecost, lies a moment which is often either forgotten or ignored. In the six weeks since we stood with Mary of Magdala before an open and empty tomb, we have shared the story of the earliest Christian community as it struggled with the death of their leader and the uncertainty of their future. We have stood with the apostles and others in the upper room in Jerusalem as Cleopas blurted out, “We met him on the road – he is alive”. Now we draw the Easter season to a close as we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension.

This day is a difficult one to preach about without turning the event into a Star Trek sort of thing with Jesus being “beamed up” like Mr. Spock and the crew of the Enterprise. So, to avoid all that, I will reflect not upon what happened but on what the underlying story says and means to both those first followers of the Nazarene and to us in our present reality. I will use the beginning of Luke’s second book commonly known as The Book of Acts because its’ vivid description of the Ascension moment would indicate that Luke had been present there and what we have is a first-hand account.

Luke begins by reminding the reader, a person called Theophilus (which means Lover of God in Greek), of the first book we know as the Gospel of Luke. Luke does what all good authors do when they are writing a sequel – he gives a very brief outline of his previous book and then immediately links it to the story which follows which deals with the life of the birthing community in Jerusalem and in the Empire in the fifty or so years after the resurrection, ending with Peter and Paul both in prison in Rome.

When Jesus appears before the disciples and the others, their first question has to do with whether the long-anticipated end of the world will now occur so the new Kingdom of God can be installed. Jesus tells them that only God knows when things will happen' and then tells the faithful what they are to do in the meantime – a time in which WE still live today. They are to “bear witness” for Jesus and the Kingdom not only in Jerusalem but beyond even the very boundaries of the Empire, to the very ends of the earth as they knew it. They will be able to do this because God will be with them, as he promised when Jesus told the disciples in the upper room on the night of his betrayal and arrest, “Anyone who loves me will heed what I say; then the Father will love him and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him...I have told you all this while I am still here with you, but your Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and call to mind all that I have told you. Peace is my parting gift, my own peace such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest and banish your fears...the Advocate whom I will send you from the Father, will bear witness to me; and you also are my witnesses because you have been with me from the first.”

When he had finished and told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait upon the will of God, Jesus disappears from their sight and the community is left there, standing with mouths open in awe and eyes focussed on the clouds into which it seems Jesus has disappeared. And then, two men stood before them and asked, “Why are you standing here looking up into the sky? Jesus will return in the same way as you have just seen him go to the Father. Return to the city and wait.....which is what they did!

The Ascension marks the end of the time in which Jesus was physically present in his fellowship. No longer could the apostles turn to him and ask Jesus to bail them out of a disaster or explain the inexplicable to them – now they were on their own; now they were to begin assuming the role of witnesses to the truth revealed to them in the life, death and resurrection of the One from Nazara. Returning to the city, they began what must have seemed to them to be for ever – when would the Advocate come? What should they be doing as they waited? These became the ponderables of their life as they remained in that place of refuge and memory. They spent the waiting time in prayer, in conversations of reminiscence and in uncertainty. As the days lengthened, some even questioned what they had seen on the side of the Mount of Olives – some wondered if they had been duped or if their God had deserted them.

As they waited in the unknowing, they thought about what Jesus had said to them in that upper room on that long-ago Thursday night and on the side of the Mount of Olives – that they were to go into all the world, to show and tell all the wondrous things that God had accomplished in Jesus and all the marvellous things that God had planned for his beloved creation. They remembered – they remembered that on at least two other occasions, he had sent them out. Each time, Jesus paired the disciples so they would have companionship on the journey; they went two by two to offer support and confirmation to each other as they entered foreign territory bearing the good news; they had a confidante off whom each could bounce ideas and concerns; and each would be a buffer for the other, keeping it all straight and honest. They remembered what it was like to be strangers in strange lands – how frightening it was the first time they opened their mouths to speak, not knowing how the word would be received if at all; they remembered the rush they felt as their words and images found a nesting place in the minds and hearts of those who gathered with them on the shores of rivers and lakes, in the village squares, in the fields and in the homes; of how in the simple act of breaking bread together, strangers became friends and vulnerabilities became exposed and healed; of how sometimes, a force beyond themselves took over and did things that none of them could have dreamed or imagined. They remembered and they were once again filled with apprehension and worry.

How were they to do it this time? They remembered returning from their mission work filled with stories and how Jesus had listened with an intensity like none other as each of the community shared the laughter and the tears of the wonder-filled things which God had done through them. They wept over their failures as some threatened them with stoning; they danced over the small victories as they heard the words, “Lord I believe” rise like smoke from the incense pots in the Temple to envelop the gathering place with holiness and peace. They remembered that at the end of their pilgrimage into the fire that Jesus was always there at the homecoming, standing like the father in the story he told of the man and his two sons, standing with arms wide open ready, willing and able to embrace each as their journey ended and saying to one and all, “Welcome home.”

Only, this time, this time, there would be no Lord waiting. Had they not witnessed his rising after he told them to return to the city; did he not tell that they he was returning to his Father and they the work ahead lay in their hands and hearts? Yes, and he had added more – he told them that God would not leave them defenceless, but would send the Advocate, the Spirit to accompany them and their work. The Ruach-breath which the Father had breathed over first creation, the breath which had hovered over the chaos of birth – she would be with them in their work of new creation.

But when...when? Jesus had not circled a date on a calendar – no, all he had said was, “Go and wait... the Father is Master of time and space and when the time is ripe for the harvest, the Spirit will bless and send.” And so they waited behind the closed doors once again, waiting, waiting, waiting.....until.....

Amen

The Apostle's Creed

Celebrant Let us confess the faith of our baptism, *as we say,*

All I believe in God,

the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again

to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Celebrant: You are free, Lord. Your ascension has set you free, free from the constraints of human existence, from the outside limitations of time and space. You are free to be with us now in our worship and fellowship and free to be with us always. In your freedom, you have bound yourself to us with a promise when you said, "I am with you always, even to the very end of time."

We pray Lord for all those who need to feel you close today, who need the blessed assurance of your continuing love and the encouragement of your Holy Spirit...

All: **Lord, hear and have mercy.**

Celebrant: We pray for those who imprisoned, who are tortured or exiled because they have fought, struggled and spoken out against the darkness for the rights of their people. For those who are destitute, who are hungry, who are refugees because of the selfishness and apathy of the world...

All: **Lord, hear and have mercy.**

Celebrant: We pray for those who are filled with guilt, who are broken-hearted, who are perplexed because a relationship in their life has gone wrong ...

All: **Lord, hear and have mercy.**

Celebrant: We pray for all who are feeling fed up particularly during this pandemic time, for those who are in discomfort, for those who are afraid because they are ill in body, mind or spirit ...

All: **Lord, hear and have mercy.**

Celebrant: We pray for those who are numb, who are filled with anger, for the desolate because they have been bereaved ...

All: **Lord, hear and have mercy.**

Celebrant: We pray for all those caught up in wars and acts of violence and hatred, especially the innocent children ...

All: **Lord, hear and have mercy.**

Celebrant: We pray for those in financial distress, for those who have lost their jobs, for those whose self-worth has been beaten down by isolation and COVID ...

All: **Lord, hear and have mercy.**

Celebrant: Be with us all Lord, in all our daily struggles as we seek to follow you. Be with us all Lord, in our times of doubt and despair and in our times of joy and happiness, health and love. Be with us all Lord until that time when in your Kingdom of Love our joy will know no end. **Amen**
(from re:Worship - adapted)

We ask you to watch over all our parish family, remembering especially Zachariah, Marjorie, Cheryl, Jeanette, Roy, Emerson, Irene, and their families.

In the Worldwide Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for The Anglican Church of Korea.

In our Diocesan Cycle, we pray for St. Bede's, Nolan's Corners, and their Priests, The Venerable Brian Kauk and The Reverend Canon Mary Ellen Berry.

We pray for all custodial staff serving within the parishes and ministries of the Diocese of Ottawa.

For vocations to the diaconate, priesthood and religious life.

Confession and Absolution

Celebrant: Lord, before your ascended from our sight, you promised to be with us until the end of time. Be with us now Brother as we pray

All: Almighty God, we confess that often we have our eyes in the clouds instead of on the good earth you have shared with us. We desire heavenly treasure but we keep believing that worldly means will help us to attain it. Forgive us for our short-sightedness and draw us away from all temptations to seek worldly power and human measures of success. Recall us to your down-to-earth message of Love Divine. Help us to care for the needs of those who surround us, especially the oppressed and the marginalized. You have called us through scripture to care for the widows and orphans among us; help us to break down the dividing walls we have created and built between ourselves and others, so that we may truly be one, as you and Christ are one. We pray all this in his blessed name.

Celebrant: We were made by God, brought forth from the earth which was called good when God created it. Sister and brother, your very being is good. You are blessed, earth born and called forth to care for Mother Earth and all who dwell under her arms. Go, know that you are forgiven and loved by the Creator God who made you and share the Good News. Alleluia!
(from re: Worship adapted)

Additional Prayers

Celebrant: Gracious God, your ascended Son promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. Send your spirit of revelation and wisdom that we may be witnesses to your grace and forgiveness, freedom and hope, joy and salvation. Open our minds to understand your will so that when sin cripples our hope, we may rediscover the freedom of your forgiveness; when suffering and death overtake our lives, we may know the joy of the risen Christ; and when we feel abandoned we may comprehend the full power of the promised Spirit. Holy Father, Father of the Risen and Ascended Christ, you surround us with witnesses who show us the way. Inspire us with your Spirit to stop looking into the heavens and start doing your work here on earth. Help us to seek justice, becoming a people who nourish and clothe others, Help us to love kindness, becoming a people who forgive and accept forgiveness from others, a people who show mercy and live in love. Help us to walk humbly with you, becoming a people whose secret identities melt away revealing the Christ within us. Sovereign Lord, Father of all in the power of the Spirit, we continue to pray for those who have suffered at the hands of nature or humankind. Help us to reach out to those desperate for help. Almighty God, whose blessed Son Jesus ascended far above the heavens that he might fill all things, mercifully give us faith to perceive that, according to his promise, he abides with his Church here on earth to the end of all ages and time. We pray this in the name of Jesus who gifted to us, his Church, these words which now we pray.

The Lord's Prayer

Celebrant: And now, as our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread.

**And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.**

Amen.

**All: Lord Jesus, we thank you that you came in human form and lived here on earth. You always did what your Father desired. Today, we celebrate the day when you left the earth by being taken into heaven where you sit on the throne on your Father's right side. We remember and believe that you will fulfill all your promises and so we wait for your return when sin and darkness and death will be defeated for all time. Jesus, we need your presence in our lives, your direction and help to show us the path we should be walking. Continue to shepherd us along the Kingdom road.
Amen**

Blessing and Dismissal

Celebrant: The silence breaks into the morning. That One Star lights the world. The lily springs to life
Let us begin singing and never end! O children quit your lamenting! O pilgrims, upon your knees in tearful prayer, rise up, take your hearts and run. We who once were no people are named anew – God's people - rise up and go in the name of God the Creating One, Jesus the Redeeming One and the Holy Spirit, the Renewing One.

Amen and Alleluia!

HOLY TRINITY COUNCIL / CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Holy Trinity Parish Council is meeting next Tuesday, May 18 at 6:30pm over Zoom. We are inviting everyone to attend as our first agenda item will be to update everyone about the Shape of Parish Ministry Consultation that has begun in the diocese.

The diocese launched this initiative in April and Reverend Michael, and your wardens attended. We would like to share what we learned at the launch. Participation of everyone in our congregation will be needed during this consultation process. You can visit the diocesan webpage to learn more about this and to read Bishop Shane's charge to Synod 2020, listen to his Easter message and listen to his talk at the launch of this initiative where he provides an overview of the purpose of this.

www.ottawa.anglican.ca/shape-of-parish-ministry

The link for the meeting will be sent next Tuesday. Please mark the date in your calendar and plan to attend. Looking forward to seeing all of you.