

## Ascension Day Year A

### The Right Things at the Right Time

(RCL) Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53; Psalm 47 or Psalm 93

Crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. All in a little over forty days.

From sadness to guilt, to hopelessness, to fear, to doubt, to hopefulness, the feelings of the disciples have been a roller coaster.

Jesus has told the disciples that he had to suffer, but would be raised in three days. Did they believe him? No! Peter even rebuked Jesus, saying that this could not happen, leading to Jesus calling him Satan. Then Jesus *was* arrested. And then Jesus *was* crucified. In three days, the stone was removed, and the tomb was empty. Angels and even Jesus himself appeared to tell his followers that he was raised, and still they doubted! He had to show up inside locked doors, on the road to Emmaus walking with some disciples, and by the beach to cook breakfast with them, just to convince them that he was raised.

Now, forty days after his resurrection, once again, Jesus recapped what he had told the disciples before: that he is to fulfill the Scriptures.

*"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

The disciples had not been able to understand what the life and ministry of Jesus were about while he was with them before, so Jesus told them one last time while he was still among them. He commissioned the disciples to proclaim "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations," and that they should begin this proclamation in Jerusalem.

In today's Gospel lesson, the author talks about Jesus being "carried up into heaven." The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

In the sequel to the Gospel of Luke, the Book of Acts, the author elaborates on the reactions of the apostles: "When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?'"

Why do you stand looking up toward heaven? Yes, their rabbi is really gone! These disciples are at a loss again. God is showing steadfast love, sending these two messengers to remind them not just to stand and look up, but to look around, look ahead, and look toward the work they must do.

They must proclaim "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations." They must be witnesses to what just happened. And they must *not* worry; they will receive the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission. Jesus has promised to send the Paraclete, the advocate in his absence, the power from on high. Jesus has told them to stay in Jerusalem to wait for it.

Going through something traumatic, it is easy to dwell on the past or fantasize about the future, but it is not easy to stay in the present. However, the present is exactly where Jesus wants the disciples to be.

Now the disciples should realize they are not only followers anymore, but also leaders. They cannot only stand there, looking up toward heaven. Rather, they need to follow Jesus' commission, and they need to get into action. Nevertheless, before their action, before the Holy Spirit is bestowed on them, they need to reflect, to pray, and to bless God.

The verses after today's reading from the Book of Acts tell us that, "When [the disciples] had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying . . . All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers" (Acts 1:13a, 14).

Finally, the disciples' minds are opened to understand the Scriptures and the purpose of Jesus' teaching. The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24:53). As we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, "With the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you."

From then on, the disciples of Jesus set up the Church and proclaimed the repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus to all nations. That is how we have had the Good News passed to us.

They have set a great example for us, the later followers. When we are at a loss, before we carry out our call, we need to pray and bless God, being in the very presence of God.

In our divided world, things seem to have changed for the worse. Life seems to be upside-down, with racial tension, terrorist attacks, chaos in the Middle East, and so much more. We may be like the disciples, with the tendency to look upward and not see the present, our call. But no, we must stay in the present, grounding ourselves in Jesus the Christ to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in his name, and bearing witness to the grace of God.

We have been celebrating the joy of Jesus' resurrection, looking forward to being in God's kingdom in the future. But it is not for us to know when or how. The Eastertide is about to end. We know in order to get to Easter, we had to go through Good Friday. Now, with the hope of that blessed day, we are not afraid of suffering. The time to get in action is here. It is not an easy task, but we will not be alone; the Holy Spirit will be with us. Stay tuned and stay in the presence of God. *Amen.*

*The Rev. Dr. Ada Wong Nagata is Priest-in-Charge and Director of Ah Foo Jubilee Community Center at Church of Our Savior, Manhattan, a bilingual congregation speaking English and Cantonese in Chinatown. She is a board member of Li Tim-Oi Center, a Chinese Ministry Center of The Episcopal Church based in the Diocese of Los Angeles, and Honorary Canon of the Cathedral Center of St. Paul, also in the Diocese of Los Angeles. Ada earned her Doctor of Ministry from Episcopal Divinity School in 2015. She served as Convener of the Chinese Convocation of Episcopal Asiamerican Ministries (EAM) from 2009 to 2016. She loves hiking and meditative walking.*

*Published by the Office of Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. © 2017 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.*