

Sermon for 12 May 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
Ascension Sunday/Mother's Day/Festival of the Christian Home
Scriptures: Acts 1:1-11; Psalter: 78:1-8; Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-52

What an array of topics and texts to choose from!

Ascension Day scriptures are included because the annual date of it actually falls between last Sunday and today in the Christian calendar. I chose them as our focus this year because of its importance in summing up the meaning of Easter. Without belittling Christ's resurrection, the Church has always included this teaching of closure in its biography of Jesus. We say resurrection declares that Jesus is ALWAYS with us as believers, but we add that the quality, the energy, of his presence pays attention to the rest of our human experience.

I've always particularly loved the way Luke describes the two men in white robes appearing alongside the disciples gazing up toward heaven: "They said, 'men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way you saw him go into heaven.'"

There are so many ramifications here. How do we ever let go of a loved one in death? Uniquely in Jesus' case, how do we ever separate his presence, for us, from the presence of God, the creator, the Spirit working all things? Remember, the disciples had just been pressing Jesus about dates and power, saying, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" How aptly Luke has driven home to the Church the definition of our assignment: We are to wait, watch, and be about the Creator's business, not to know "the times and the seasons."

Our Global Ministries Prayer Calendar has its own way of supporting the Lectionary readings through its daily scripture selections. Last Friday it had Exodus 24:15-18 describing Moses surrounded by a cloud after completing his final instructions to the Israelites on how they should follow God. Elsewhere it quoted the tradition that no one ever knew the location of Moses' burial. This idea of never knowing the full plan, but always watching and sticking with the guidelines we've been given, is fundamental to our Old *and* New Testament understanding.

But this is also Mother's Day, and the Festival of the Christian Home, and even though we know our contemporary society's tendency to commercialize and moralize these honorable commemorations, it is surely right to remember our broader approach to scripture and human relations and responsibility. We must recognize how much more equal and blended divine characteristics are than the Bible generally specifies. Both Joseph and Mary raised our Lord, as far as we know. Certainly the feminine side of God is not only in Hosea and Esther and Isaiah and in events and descriptions as we read and interpret the texts and tradition. Certainly Mary and all the other women who sponsored both the maternity and masculinity of Jesus and all those who related to him are basic to God's acts through him.

That, in fact, is what we especially celebrate this Sunday. We are one soul and body, varied and united, as we in this latest General Conference have beautifully been able to declare in our United Methodist tradition. We have, through Jesus Christ's ways with both his generation and with us, been able to present to our time how precious power becomes in the joined masculine and feminine side of human love. We are only beginning to see this, as we work through race division and anti-this- and anti-that. It's just the start of better religion, better government, better humankind and broader cooperation with nature itself, that we in our time are beginning.

Let us pray: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Father and Mother, Divine integrity in our souls and bodies, bless all the parts of ourselves and our moment this day. Let us learn more how as we to let go and start afresh; how to expand love in loss as well as in birth and maturing. Black and white, aging and newborn, beautiful in our blending of so many patterns and so much increasing of respect, we are each unique and yet blended. Continue our growth, as we allow more life to blossom and to live more fully alive. By your grace we love ourselves and all creation.! Thank you for your incredible treasuring of all of us. Amen.