

Ascension of the Lord –B 2006
Patrick Hall

Acts 1: 1-1

In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the holy Spirit."

When they had gathered together they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He answered them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. **But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**"

When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.

While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."

Ephesians 4: 1-13

I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace:

one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call;

one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Today is Ascension Sunday.

So then the Lord Jesus... was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God.

Can you see that in your mind's eye?
I remember a time before I could even read, a glorious picture in my Golden Book of the Bible.

I remember sky and clouds, rays of sunshine, Jesus with his outstretched arms 3 stories above the ground.

He was a smiling Jesus, not the tortured one from Good Friday.

His robes were gleaming white.

The disciples were standing on a hill, looking up and gawking.

This is one of those scenes that illustrate something beyond our experiences, beyond the natural, beyond our senses and our understanding of physics and chemistry.

Many cultures of Jesus' time understood there was the reality of our experiences and an alternate reality beyond.

We Christians call that reality beyond Heaven.

These cultures understood there to be an entryway between the two parts of reality: ordinary and alternate.

According to the sacred traditions of these cultures, that hole or crack or door is located over the city in which is located the earthly abode of the deity.

In Greek tradition, the hole was over Delphi.

In the Israelite tradition, the hole is over Jerusalem.¹

This entryway was of the spiritual, beyond even the super of natural.

The disciples experienced a spiritual event

Therefore, it says: "He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men."

What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended into the lower (regions) of the earth?

The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ,

Mark 16:15-20

Jesus said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.

These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages.

They will pick up serpents (with their hands), and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them.

They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.)

Reading 1: **But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

Reading 2: **And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ,**

Gospel: **Jesus said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.**

Theme: **WHY?**

which transcended even the physical wonder depicted in my Golden Book.

But how else could one describe a spiritual event than to use physical images?

However that scene could be apprehended, we know that it was a group experience that they all shared.

Can you imagine the emotions and psychological impact of such an encounter?

As a child, I thought that picture was the end of the story: Jesus wins!!

Now, as I imagine myself back in let's say Peter's or John's shoes, I think my reaction would be: "Hey, Jesus, where are you going?" a question the disciples had asked before.

Think about it.

Jesus had led an incredible life.

He preached repentance.

He was a champion for the poor and powerless.

He healed the infirm and crippled.

He pricked the consciences of those who oppressed.

He even raised Lazarus from the dead.

At this, the authorities trembled with fear.

There was only one thing to do: crucify Jesus!

Of course, **this** didn't even go their way.

Talk about not being able to keep a good man down, how about a man who is God incarnate?

1. The Cultural World of the Prophets, Year B, p72
by John J. Pilch
The Liturgical Press, 2002

And so we have Easter, the resurrection.

If I was one of the disciples, I think I'd be on top of the world.

"Man, we're going to show them now."

What do you think a resurrected Jesus would be able to do?

Talk about preaching.

Talk about healing.

Talk about "*casting down the mighty*" and "*lifting up the lowly*".

(Lk 1:52)

"But, hey Jesus, where are you going?"

WHY?

The great philosophical question:
The one that employs professors and
the one that my three-year old never
tired of repeating.

WHY?

*But I tell you the truth, it is better for
you that I go.*

*For if I do not go, the Advocate will
not come to you.*

But if I go, I will send him to you.

(Jn 16:7)

But when he comes,

the Spirit of truth,

he will guide you to all truth.

(Jn 16:13)

The meaning of the Ascension then
is to be found in Pentecost.

And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were.

Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them.

And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. (Acts 2:2-4)

I guess my Golden Book picture of Jesus in the clouds isn't the end of the story after all.

One of our Eucharistic prayers says Jesus became human so that we could become divine.

The Acts of the Apostles goes on to tell our story,
the story of us disciples,
Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.
Acts tells of Peter leading an incredible life.
He preached repentance.
He was a champion for the poor and powerless.
He healed the infirm and crippled.
He pricked the consciences of those who oppressed.
He even raised Tabitha from the dead.

The authorities trembled with fear.
There was only one thing to do:
crucify Peter!
Our tradition tells of him being crucified upside-down as he felt unworthy to emulate Jesus' crucifixion.

Peter was able to lay down his life because, in faith, he knew Jesus' resurrection awaited him as well.

Why did this one man, Jesus, ascend?

So that the Spirit from the Father and through the Son could fill the hearts of his disciples.

So that in baptism, the immersion in the Spirit, his disciples could become Christs.

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.

(Jn 14:12)

Today, there are 2 billion Christians on this earth.

There are two billion of us so that if we allow Christ to remain in us and we in him, we can be Jesus' saving presence.

We can preach repentance.

We can be champions for the poor and powerless.

We can heal the infirm and crippled.

We can prick the consciences of those who oppress.

We can selflessly commit our lives to each other even to the point of laying them down.

Why did Jesus ascend?

So that we can act as Jesus for each other. With 2 billion of us, imagine the magnitude of God's healing and justice and love.

What greater love is there than this?