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“May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened” (Ephesians 1:18).

Acts 1:1-11; Ps 47; Eph 1:17-23; Matt 28:16-20

The Ascension of the Lord

Scores of new graduates now face bleak prospects in a collapsing economy and an uncertain future. Prepared for chosen careers and filled with hope and energy, where do they go from here?

The church enters a similar zone as it celebrates Ascension and faces the question of how each of us will take up the challenge of discipleship in the age of the Spirit. Where do we go from here?

The Ascension is a departure story that reveals the mystery of who Jesus is, but also tells us that it took the disciples time and a profound new faith to grasp their next move. As narrative, the Ascension is more theology than history, an enthronement vision like the Assumption of Moses or the fiery departure of the Prophet Elijah (2 Kgs 2). It also mimics the Roman protocol of a victorious general, clothed in glory, ascending to take his place by the throne of the emperor.

For Jews who knew the Scriptures by heart, such an enthronement vision was the key mystical moment. At his conversion, Paul had this vision and was shocked to see the crucified Jesus standing at the right hand of God. It took him years to fully

unpack what he has seen in a flash on the road to Damascus.

In Acts, the Apostle also glimpse Jesus in glory as he is taken up. They stand stupefied, gazing up into the clouds until messengers send them back to Jerusalem to pray for Pentecost. In Matthew's shorter account, they assemble in Galilee for final instructions, worshiping Jesus but still troubled by doubt and fear.

These Scriptures accurately position us in the same place the Apostles were left, standing in awe and confusion. But this is exactly where we are meant to be as we approach Pentecost. Only now can we grasp that the familiar figure of Jesus has, like Elvis, left the building, but also that he is even more accessible to us through the Holy Spirit.

This makes the interval between the Ascension and Pentecost the most critical transition in our faith formation. If we do not let go of our precious projections and cherished ideas about Jesus of Nazareth and make the leap of faith to the mysterious crucified and risen Christ who transcends history, we will not begin to know him alive in our hearts. Jesus Christ is now present and timeless whenever and wherever the Spirit reveals him. If we don't let go of him as he was or as we want him to be, we will not be ready to know him as he is. We will not be able to move forward to the adventure of discipleship.

The author of Ephesians gives us a joyful proclamation of the meaning of welcoming the Spirit of Jesus Christ into our lives: "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened." Embrace the mystery of the risen Christ whose glory now indwells the church and us the members of his body. Because Jesus is here and now, not then and there, and the world desperately needs his healing presence, he is calling us to be his voice, mind, heart, hands and feet.

Ascension is our graduation, and Pentecost will reveal our part of his redemptive mission in the world today. We can be sure of one thing. There are no non-essential workers in God's vineyard. We are all frontline disciples. We are now being called to serve and, if needed, to lay down our lives as Jesus did.

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