

Good morning! I am Tom DuMontier. I have lived in Staunton for almost 19 years. But in August, my family and I are moving to Sewanee, Tennessee, where I will start seminary in the Fall. One of my goals in the next three years is to celebrate the church feast days and to toast all the minor saints and important figures of our shared church and Episcopal heritage. As I age, my love for the liturgical calendar grows. It is rather elegant how the pieces of our creeds, our church history and the organization of our year fit together. In this season of pandemic; in this season of weird and messy, I am grateful for order. When my body and mind feel Lent, I can look at our church calendar and be reminded it is Eastertide. Easter begins with resurrection, and 40 days later moves to something celebrated less robustly, the Ascension.

Ascension day commemorates the bodily Ascension of Jesus into Heaven!

Remember the Nicene Creed:

*On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

There was a time when for some reason I ignored that semicolon between, “he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures” and “he ascended into heaven.” Why did I miss it? It is like the second side of a record that for some reason you did not carefully listen to. You got so excited about side A that you skipped side B.

Well, if you’ll excuse me, let’s examine side B, which also happens to be part of today’s lectionary... a deeper cut omitted from Morning Prayer. It is from Acts 1:6-14.

When the apostles had come together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” 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? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying; Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas,

Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Wow! We have redeemed, human, flesh-and-blood going to the right hand of the Father. We have unification of the Trinity, the unification of Earth to Heaven and the promise of the Holy Spirit. Wow! Jesus doesn't unzip his human suit, ascend and go through the cloud. He takes his body and in taking his body he makes a way for all of us. We have eternal life and ... we bare witness to the full mystery of the Trinity. What a thing to be celebrated.

Yet, in the moment before Christ's ascension the disciples ask a lot of questions: "Lord is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel? Are the last now going to be first? Will truth and justice bloom where we have lies, tyranny and corruption? Is this the time things get straightened out here on mothership Earth?" Jesus replies that this is not for us to know and God sets his own authority.

Guh! What a gut punch. There will be no short-order justice, no instant kingdom come. Why do the disciples think this way. Why do we think this way? I know I do sometimes. This thinking is low, unimaginative, concrete, predictable and yes.... rational. Kind of like a mental slant-rhyme. I am reminded of the Michelle Obama quote/ mantra, "When they go low, we go high!" Elegant, beautiful words. Good earthly advice. But in the cosmic sense, we continue to go low asking Jesus to conform to our lives and work to our desired outcomes. What happens if we get crazy and go for a cruciform or cross shaped-life...a life less our own? What if we let Christ flow through us and transform us? What if we die to live? What if we choose to lose in order to win? What if we ascend?

I love the alternative collect for Ascension Day in the prayer book:

*Grant, we pray, Almighty God, that as we believe your only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into heaven, so we may also in heart and mind there ascend, and with him continually dwell; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

*so we may also in heart and mind there ascend, and with him continually dwell;*

What a hope! What a promise! It is not a platitude!

This ascent is not about achievement or action. Ascent is about being acted upon, through a receptive listening to God's voice and responding to the nudgings of the Holy Spirit.

Our ascension passage in Acts ends with a group listening in an upstairs room, devoting themselves to prayer. Men and women together. What a beautiful image of us, for us.

I pray that we more fully embody this image. I hope you will take some time this week to be with the embers of this Easter season & that you will take time to listen.

AMEN