

Ascension 2021– Don't just stand there looking into heaven, get to work!

1. Today we celebrate the Ascension, which was actually this past Thursday but we don't have service then, and it's an important day in the life of the Church
  - a. I don't think we remember the Ascension because it's often abstracted by theologians obsessed with their own theory about what it reveals about Christ
    - i. For instance, in our own Christian Cyclopedia which is written for lay-people, "The Ascension marks, for the Savior, the highest degree of exaltation, as it implies His session at the right hand of God, His entering into the full use, according to His human nature, of the divine attributes, of which He relinquished the full, continued use and enjoyment during His State of Humiliation."
    - ii. Remember that's written for lay people not theologians!
    - iii. But it's all theological speak, a totally erudite and well thought out statement, but it's lost in translation – do you feel better about the ascension now that it's been explained?
    - iv. The church so often gets bogged down in the philosophical, that it misses the practical.
  - b. Contextually in our reading from Acts, the apostles have been with their Lord for 40 days after the resurrection;
    - i. He had revealed that death could not hold Him, even eating and drinking with them but now He's no longer going to be present with them
    - ii. He was about to return to heaven; no longer with them to teach them or to guide them in their day-to-day activities.
    - iii. We all know that the loss of someone significant; family, friends, or work can leave us with a sense of, "What now?"
    - iv. How do you pick up where you left off especially when you're dealing with the loss of a loved one, one on whom you relied for strength and direction like the Apostles did with Jesus?
  - c. So as our Lord ascended back into heaven Luke reports, "**as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.**" (Acts 1:9)
    - i. You can imagine that there was a profound sense of loss probably coupled with the astonishment of what they were seeing.
    - ii. It's not every day that someone you know gets taken bodily to heaven so I am sure this was an event to behold.
    - iii. Think of all the lesser things that we slow down to look at: we have a morbid fascination with car accidents along the side of the road, they always cause a spectacle, any celestial event (meteor, eclipse, etc) we stop and look up.
    - iv. So, I think we can "excuse" the apostles for being a little pre-occupied with their Lord's ascension that they would be staring off into heaven after Him.
  - d. But they must have been gazing a little too intently or a little too long because Luke also reports, "**And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold,**

**two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?” (Act 1:10-11)**

- i. The apostles weren't meant to just wait for Jesus to return, the angels were saying, “Why are standing there looking into heaven – you have work to do!”
  - ii. Jesus had just given them their mission as He rose, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8)
  - iii. This is Luke's account of the Great Commission given in Matthew 28, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”** (Mt 28:19),
2. Jesus' ministry wasn't over, it was just beginning, and it was going to be carried out through the ones sent in His Name
- a. We see that mission unfold throughout Acts: Peter and his Pentecost sermon and ministry to the Jews
    - i. The persecution of the Christians at the hands of the Jewish leaders,
    - ii. We learn of Saul from which disciples fled and continued to spread the Gospel where they went
    - iii. And then the miraculous conversion of Saul to Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles throughout Palestine and into Europe
    - iv. But Luke ends his book in a wholly unsatisfactory manner with Paul in prison in Rome, no conclusions drawn, no “happily ever after” anyone reading the book could very well ask, “Well what now?”
  - b. And that's because like our Lord's ministry didn't end with Him, the book of the Acts of the Apostles doesn't conclude with them but is carried on in their disciples down to today
    - i. At the beginning of our reading in Acts Luke writes, **In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach...**
    - ii. Today we could very easily ask, “What now,” like the apostles could have when Jesus ascended but we don't need to because “what now” is for you
    - iii. The apostles were called to witness, pastors have been called to preach and shepherd, and you have been called to live.
    - iv. Of course, we still know that our Lord could return any time and we are told to remain vigilant like the wise virgins who kept oil in their lamps and were prepared to meet the bridegroom when He came. (Mt 25:1-14)
3. But we are not just standing about looking up into heaven waiting for our Lord to come back, we've got work to do!”
- a. Remember that many of Jesus' parables were about the time between His earthly ministry ending and the day when He would return and what His servants should do.
    - i. In the Gospel of Luke He tells the parable of the minas, a unit of money that the master entrusted to his servants to use for business while he was away

saying, **“A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ (Luk 19:12-13)**

- ii. When the master returned, he asked for an accounting of the business that each servant did with the money and punished the one who did nothing with the money except keep it to give back to the master.
  - iii. The parable represents the time in which we now live, the time between Jesus’ ascension and His return, the money represents the talents, abilities, and resources God has given us to conduct His kingdom’s business before His return.
  - iv. As good and faithful servants we put to use that which we have been given for the sake of the master.
- b. Just as Jesus’ ministry didn’t stop after His ascension but continued through the Apostles, now He works through you
- i. Our Lord’s words in the Sermon on the Mount are for us today, **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven,” (Mt 5:16)**
  - ii. We have work to do, we can’t afford to sit idly by looking up into heaven waiting for Christ to return, there are disciples to be made!
  - iii. Through the cross God has made every area of life holy so that whatever you are doing you are His instrument by which He serves and supports His creation and furthers the Gospel
  - iv. Our Savior is active in the world through His disciples who are His witnesses by the words they speak and the lives that they live.
- c. So on this Ascension Sunday while we could get distracted by theologizing about what this event means don’t just stand there looking into heaven, get to work!