

The Ascension of our Lord – 2021

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53

The ordinary, the common, the everyday – this is a remarkably predictable world in which we live. The sun rises in the east with mind-numbing constancy. Why doesn't it, just once, rise in the west? It used to be called the "Rat Race." Climb into your shiny metal box and compete on the freeway to arrive at the job where you do the same thing, day after day, only to hustle it back home on the same freeway with the same subset of humanity. Jack Arnold, the father in the old TV series "The Wonder Years" would be asked the same question when he got home in the evening. Cue the perky wife, "How was work, Jack?" Jack would always respond with a polite snarl: "work's work." Everyone wrestles with the doldrums. John Cougar sang this line about Jack and Diane: "life goes on long after the thrill of living is gone."

Various events in our year help us to reorient our disposition. Birthdays, Mother's Day, Valentines Day, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Father's Day, Veteran's Day, Independence Day, Labor Day – these festivals break the monotony that can become outsized in our heads. We sometimes need reorienting. The Grinch, reclining in his dilapidated La-Z-Boy, starts munching on a glass bottle and asks: "Am I just eating because I'm bored?" Where are your eyes fixated? What occupies your mind, your heart, your daily outlook? It's tempting in this life to look exclusively at the day to day and lose perspective. It's understandable. You've got earthly obligations. There are demands that are put on you to which you must give your attention.

This is a spiritual world. God created all that you see and all that you can't see by the power of His Word. His power was unleashed and life came springing from His divine will. There is nothing mundane about the life that God creates. This is a spiritual world. Since the fall of our first parents in the Garden, life and death have been locked in a cosmic struggle. Sin is a hostile and depraved affront to the God who is Holy, Holy, Holy. This is a spiritual world. God breathed His Spirit into the first man and Adam became a living being (Genesis 2:7). God poured His Spirit into you as you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). You are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), alive with Christ's resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is a spiritual world. God is constantly at work, bringing the fruit of His Son's life to bear on sinners who need to be delivered from death and judgment and hell. God wants you to be aware, this is a spiritual world. Satan would lull you to sleep. Satan would have you believe only in what you can see, only what the physical world presents, only what serves your stomach. Your eyes... on what are they fixated? What pulls at your mind? Is it purely shopping, chardonnay, sports, politics and the image you see in the mirror?

This is a spiritual world. God caused the Red Sea to part in order to deliver His people Israel from the tyrannical Pharaoh who had murder in his heart. God gave Israel water from a rock. God brought down the walls of Jericho after a 7-day march and the blast of a ram's horn. This is a spiritual world; it always has been. You are a creature of this world. You are a creature of your Creator – created to have a body and a soul, wonderfully united, wonderfully cooperative, wonderfully balanced. Your head is Christ. You were created to be in union with the Son of

God. All of God's mighty acts in the OT point forward to God's supreme deliverance, the ultimate act of restoring humanity through His Son. The Lord Christ ascends. With our humanity, with the wounds of His sacrifice, with His eternal victory etched in His flesh, Jesus Christ ascends and is seated at the right hand of the Father. This is a spiritual world.

Where are you going to learn of this spiritual world? Does the school system embrace the veracity of God's Word? Is Netflix alive with the beauty of Christian doctrine, inspiring our hearts and minds with the magnificence of Holy Writ? Pop culture has completely abandoned any reference to Christianity as being the definitive revelation of what it means to be human. Pluralism has won our civil cultural war and the Savior of the Scriptures is persona non grata. Who is to blame? How have we come to be where we are? Where do we intend to go? This life is worth living. This life that we have, right now, in the cultural milieu in which we find ourselves, this right-now-life is worth living. It is God who has brought us here – for a reason that is good and significant and full of opportunity. Where are we to fix our eyes in this spiritual world?

We fix our eyes on Christ, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2). In joy, in humility and devotion and joy God Almighty gave Himself up to the shameful cross. Crucified, He spends His life to ensure that you will not die but live. We fix our eyes on Christ. We stick our eyes in our ears and we listen to the Gospel. Into our ears is preached Christ and Him crucified, a spiritual reality that envelops this whole earth. He ascends into heaven; He presents His wounds before His Father and He speaks your name. Father, forgive him. Father, forgive her for she is mine, washed in My blood, a recipient of My righteousness and I am here to prepare a place for her. This is a spiritual world. Our eyes are fixed on Christ. We set our minds on things that are above, where Christ is seated, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1-4). We died with Christ. Buried with Him in baptism we were raised a new creation. This is a spiritual world. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. He is going to return and we wait for Him. We wait for Him because this world is not our end. We are on our way; there is more in store for us. More love, more life, more harmony, more beauty, more security, more peace, more blessedness, more knowledge, more joy – we are strangers here; heaven is our home. More is what death and resurrection has prepared.

He's going to return in the same way that He departed (Acts 1:11). All the world will see Him. "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him." (Revelation 1:7). We wait; we watch; we anticipate His return by daily crucifying the old man with its sinful desires. We anticipate His return by consciously determining not to live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). We anticipate His return by embracing the truth that He is not absent from us. He is with us. He is just as much present with us as He was with His disciples in the Upper Room on the night of His betrayal. He is just as present in the sacrament of the altar as He will be in the heavenly wedding banquet. Christ and His holiness invaded this broken creation. He was determined to be with us. He has determined that we should partakers of His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). This is His world. On this earth He died. On this earth He was raised to life. No human being can evade Jesus' death and resurrection. His sacrifice has paid the price for every sin, every sinner, regardless of tribe, nation, language or people. Grace permeates Christ's church, permeates this Divine Service, permeates your soul.

This is a spiritual world. It is foolishness to live as though it were not. Christ has, by His mercy, brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). We are a regal people by virtue of Christ the King. We are a tribe of priests and queens and vessels of light. The world's mission is to make us egocentric and self-indulgent and foolish because the world has an active antipathy toward Christ, the truth, and what is genuinely good. Do we want to love what He commands? Faith says, "yes!" More and More, may my heart love what He commands. Do we desire to receive what He promises? Faith says, "yes!" More and More, may my heart desire what He promises. Do we want our hearts fixed where true joys are to be found? Faith says "yes!" More and More, may my heart be fixed where true joys are found. Christ is ascended. He fills all things (Ephesians 4:10). He has prepared for us a place and is leading us now that where He is we may be also (John 12:26).