

Ascension Day

May 13, 2010

Acts 1:1-11

Psalm 47

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Mount of Olives is just east of the city of Jerusalem, in the time of Jesus outside the city, separated from it by the Kidron Valley. From the summit of the mount, the whole city was laid out before the disciples, the walls, the gates, the pools, and the Temple.

The Mount of Olives was Jesus' place of meditation and prayer as His ministry unfolded. It was from the Mount of Olives that Jesus surveyed the city and called sadly, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

They had been there quite often as a retreat from the busy life of the city, separate yet close enough to be constantly reminded of their mission.

Now they are all on the mount once more, led by Jesus, hearing His final instructions, seeing His ascension to The Father, borne by a cloud.

Three of the disciples, Peter, James, and John, must have been reminded of another mountaintop not long before, and of another cloud that descended upon Jesus, proclaiming His true identity, the Son of God; the cloud was then, and is now, the glory of God the Father enveloping Jesus.

It was on that earlier mountaintop, the Mount of Transfiguration, that their journey to this moment began. The journey had been through death itself, through Resurrection, and now through reunion with the Father in glory.

When we speak of mountaintops, we aren't just speaking of a place, of geography. We speak of a spiritual meaning: mountain and mountaintops are both physical and spiritual places. Virtually all cultures have some tradition of a holy mountain or high place. There is a reason.

The base of every mountain, be it a physical or a spiritual mountain, the place where a climb or journey begins, is open and accessible to all. Then the climb becomes progressively more difficult. You can lose your way, make a wrong turn, get on the wrong path, and climb into danger; you can lose your footing and fall very far and very fast. The summit, the mountaintop, is only for those who overcome the obstacles and dangers of the way. At the summit the air is thin, the light is very bright, and the view is spectacular. From there it's one short step to the Father, to the presence of God.

So in this Easter season we, and the disciples, have had the Resurrection, 40 days of the presence of Jesus, and now the Ascension. The Resurrection proved to the world beyond any possible doubt that God can and does effect change in this world, that all things in this world, even death itself, are subject to His will.

The Ascension proves that Jesus is the Son of God. It is as simple as that.

Why the 40 days? It's a long time, long enough, you would think, that the disciples, even the most obtuse disciple, would hear and understand the message and the significance of the presence of Jesus. They don't; they still assume that God is concerned only with Israel, that God's plan is no more than the restoration of Israel to its former Davidic power and glory. I might add that if you are familiar

with such Old Testament books as Samuel, Chronicles, and Kings, you know that God might not want to go through all that again.

Jesus has final, parting words for the disciples, words to be remembered by them and by you and me. God's Kingdom is not restricted in scope; it is universal. They, His disciples, and you and I, will have, and have now, the task of bringing word of that kingdom to the world, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This, Valdosta, Georgia, is the end of the earth to one standing on the Mount of Olives.

In His Holy Name.