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May

Living the Sequel

Stories That Matter

ASCENSION OF THE LORD, YEAR A

Ascension marks the completion of Christ's work and the beginning of ours. This service frames worship as blessing—receiving Christ's promise and responding with praise and mission.

REFERENCES

Daniel 7:9-14

Psalm 24:7-10

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53

COLORS

White

Every year, the lectionary provides a choice for the last Sunday in Eastertide: either observe the Ascension of the Lord or the Seventh Sunday of Easter. This choice comes from the fact that historically, the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord has been observed on the fortieth day after Easter in both Eastern and Western Christianity. If you're doing the math and realizing that means Ascension is always on a Thursday, you are correct! For liturgical traditions that observe feast days throughout the week (i.e., not solely on Sunday), Ascension is always observed on a Thursday, and the Seventh Sunday of Eastertide is observed on the following Sunday. However, for many Protestant traditions that do not observe weekday feasts (outside of Holy Week), we are left to decide whether to observe the Ascension of the Lord on the final Sunday of Eastertide or skip it altogether. This year, the Worship Team at Discipleship Ministries is offering resources for both options!

If your congregation rarely, if ever, observes Ascension, consider making a change this year. The Ascension of the Lord has been a feast day in Christian communities for centuries. In general, the feast is meant to celebrate the completion of Christ’s work of salvation and Christ’s entry into heaven with our human nature glorified. What we would like to add to this understanding of Ascension is the sense of blessing or benediction (discussed further in the preaching notes). Jesus does not leave us without blessing, without promise, without equipping us for what is to come. I can think of no better way, then, to observe Ascension of the Lord than to approach the whole of worship as an act of blessing—blessing God and blessing our neighbors.

Yes, I said, “Bless God.” We often think of blessing as something God graciously gives us. In the case of Luke 24:44–53, Jesus blesses the disciples, and their response is to bless God in return. So, as you prepare to observe the Ascension of the Lord, be intentional about noting who receives and gives blessings throughout the service. As you gather, name the good and gracious gifts God bestows that draw us together for worship and call the congregation to reciprocate by blessing God with praise. As you pray, declare the blessing of God’s relationship with creation that grounds our trust that God receives our prayers. Pray for discernment and guidance to be conduits of this blessing with and for our neighbors. As you go forth, call upon God to bless the gathered body and call on the gathered body to continually bless God—to praise and tell the truth about God’s good news—in all of their thoughts, words, and actions in the week to come. Let this be a worship service that, from beginning to end, embodies the blessing that Jesus demonstrates as he ascends into heaven, making the story real and present to us as present-day disciples of the Risen One.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God’s Children.

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