

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Ascension Sunday

Sermon Reflection Notes

In the preface to his book "Credo", William Sloan Coffin says "Credo – I believe – best translates 'I have given my heart to.' However imperfectly, I have given my heart to the teaching and example of Christ, which, among many other things, informs my understanding of faiths other than Christianity."

Credo, by William Sloan

Coffin, p. xv

Ascension Sunday is a celebration that has not been integrated into culture, unlike Easter or Christmas. This Sunday we celebrate the last Sunday of Eastertide, the ascension of Jesus to heaven, without commercials or sales or even special decorations. It is, as Rev. Schuermann suggested, the 'insiders' holiday, the one celebrated by those Christians 'in the know'.

After the crucifixion, Jesus appeared to the disciples and spent 40 days teaching them. We can imagine this as an intimate, special time when the disciples heard again the essential lessons Jesus imparted. Then, the scripture tells us, they watched as he ascended into heaven, angels appeared, and (we imagine) glorious light filled the sky and singing ensued. This is a "mountaintop moment," one that follows an intense and life-altering time. It is also a foundational moment for Christianity.

This moment appears in the Apostles' Creed which we said together at the beginning of the sermon. The Apostles' Creed is a statement of Christian faith, a statement of belief, a statement of what we have given our hearts to, that helps us connect to one another and to God. First coming into use in the 4th century, the Apostles' Creed summarizes the answer to the question early Christians were asked: What do you believe? It also helps us articulate our faith when asked the same question.

We have heard from many places in scripture in the past several weeks about what we are to do as followers of Jesus. We are to go and tell the story, receive the Holy Spirit, forgive, and tend to God's sheep. This week the scripture lesson asks us to wait. Jesus ordered the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. They had questions of course, questions like what are we waiting for and how long will this take? Waiting can be hard. Jesus's answer was paradoxically clear and vague: You don't get to know God's timing, but you will receive the Holy Spirit's power and take my story to the ends of the earth.

We too are waiting...with intention and purpose, with questions and passion, with impatience and calm. We wait, standing firm on the foundations of our faith, knowing God's timing is perfect.

Scripture

Acts 1:1-11 (NRSVUE)

¹ In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ 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." ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ 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."

Discussion Questions

1. Many of us know the Apostles' Creed by heart. Most of us are familiar enough with it to say, yes, I know what it says. Rev. Schuermann mentioned it captures the essentials of the Christian faith in three parts. What are the three parts and what essential piece of Christian belief does each express?
2. In this scripture, Jesus spends 40 days with the disciples before ascension. What else comes to mind when we hear "40 days" and why do we think the Bible uses that period of time so much?
3. Read Luke 24: 50-53 where he describes Jesus's ascension and compare it to Acts 1: 6-11. How are they alike? Different?
4. These passages are believed to both be written by Luke, an artist and disciple with a distinct purpose for telling the ascension story two ways. What is the purpose of the ascension story in Luke 24? What is the purpose of the ascension story in Acts?
5. How does knowing what we believe help us understand the beliefs of others?

6. What were the disciples waiting for in this week's scripture? What does active waiting look like, sound like, feel like?

Closing Prayer

O God, you call us to wait when there are many threats around us: fear, cancer, violence, people who are different from us, loneliness, shame, death. The list goes on and on and we know it well. And in the midst of every threat, you appear among us and you speak ***your word*** of love, mercy, grace, and ***your promise*** that we are not alone, and therefore we do not have to be afraid. Help us to remember your word to us. Help us to stand on that firm foundation of your promise beneath us. Give us the courage to wait, to trust and to live by ***your word*** among us. We pray in the name of the One who taught us how to wait and how to live - Jesus, the Risen Christ. Amen.

*"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."*