

## Discernment

*"Ascension living calls us to being 'clothed in power from on high.' This is the development of spiritual eyes and insight where we see God is in all things."*

### Year C

#### Season of Easter

#### Ascension Day

Acts 1:1-11

Read the Bible passage: [Acts 1:1-11](#), The Message; or [Acts 1:1-11](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Luke 24:44-53

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Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

When I was in seminary we would issue a joke course outline, and one course was on the ascension - "It will meet in the elevator." Ascension Sunday is one that is often ignored in the UCC. Yet it is an important moment in the gospels. For Luke it is a literary device to get Jesus off stage so the church could get on with its work.

It is the time after Jesus' resurrection where followers become leaders, and must speak with their voice, testify and witnessing to their world. Like a good spiritual leader, Jesus must depart physically so we can mature as spiritual leaders. The early church claimed the Spirit that informed Jesus, that comes from God, to witness and testify in their time and space. We, too, are called to live out of the Spirit of God, to find our own witness and testimony for our age.

In Ephesians there is a line where the Christian is to "do greater things." This is the call for us today - to do greater things than our forebears in faith. "This is Ascension living, encountering God in events small and large as we awaken to our role as God's partners in bringing beauty to life. We don't need a future Second Coming if divine wholeness/holiness is coming to us with every breath. Ascension living calls us to being "clothed in power from on high." This is the development of spiritual eyes and insight where we see God is in all things. This gives us energy and wisdom to know all that is need to be a healing presence is right here, now, for God is omnipresent in all things. We don't have to invoke an energy or power from somewhere else, when God is always moving in our lives."

Living out of this vision allows the church to experiment. It is said every five hundred years the church has a rummage sale so it discovers what is essential for its living for this day. This a time the church is going

through. We have questions of how shall we live our faith? What does it mean to witness and give testimony? A typical comment of lament is this: Maybe church, as we know it, is a thing of the past. The rummage sale allows us to be with God in doing a new thing.

In our readings from Luke and Acts we get some hints on how to respond. There is a rhythm to the response needed.

The first level is one of realism. That will contain some lament for the past and for loss. In Luke the early church is moving from a Jewish/Christian community to a gentile church. There is loss. In fact, the metaphor is one where Jesus is a distant memory and they have to find within their narrative a rationale for their witness. Then there is the fact that their testifying is dangerous. The church in that time was under attack by the Romans.

After their experience with Jesus they are now on their own. They are left with memory and hope. The discernment process is built on being open to the presence of the Spirit of God. This begins in prayer, in the community of worship. They don't run off immediately for they are told to wait in prayer. From this we learn that it takes time and prayer to find one's mission, for a community to find its mission. Mission is based on reflection and examination - of asking what are the needs, what are our strengths? In prayer one finds their strength. Prayer and reflection builds the communities strength by knowing one another's strengths. It is to be open to collective power and insight. Individual insights are built up when they are shared and are open to the insights of others. There is a strength for the individual in a shared vision. It takes time for this to happen.

Waiting is never easy. It creates uncertainty. Waiting takes time, and we are afraid to waste time. However, the action of prayer and discernment locates us in the activity of God in our world. We join in the reality of God who has an aim for the future of the world, a movement toward beauty, compassion, and justice. This can change our relationship to time, for time becomes a gift. Waiting allows us to see the Spirit of God, who is at work in many guises of beauty. Prayer and discernment can aid us in seeing that the aim of God is here, in this moment, luring the universe toward more beauty. Prayer invites us to join with the process of hope that is there before we are. It is important to begin our discernment by remembering it is God's mission not ours. We do participate in it. We join the mission that is God's and then ours.

We are in exciting times where are called upon to rethink how we witness and give testimony to the activity of God in our world. Part of our problem in witnessing is a failure of nerve. This failure comes about because there has been a history of the church claiming to have all the truth. The church has tried to impose its way on others. The church requires a new vision of what it means to witness. To witness is to be humble in our claims. This means we offer our insights that are grounded in discerning what is at stake for our society and environment. This is to listen to others. To gain perspective from the many voices who are calling us to fresh understanding of what it means to have a sustainable reality. When there is mutual listening we can also be bold in what we offer.

Testimony is not neutral or disinterested, but it seeks to look at the world from the perspective of the Christian faith. We know that we have insight that is valuable for the care of the world. Our society needs a

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May the Lure be with you

new vision of what it means to care. At our best we can offer that. It can be heard when it is offered humbly and in the spirit of persuasion.

The early church had a vision of paradise. This is not some future world or after death. When one was baptized they were baptized into to the reality of God which is paradise in the here and now. It is this world God has called good. It is humanity that God trusts to nurture the goodness built into life, to tease it out and to live it. The image of paradise as this world, and being baptized into gave the early community courage to respond in nonviolent ways to the violence around them.

Our witness is to affirm the transforming power of blessing: “when we bless, or praise God, we awaken to the radical interdependence of life and the divine power moving through all life. Blessing connects, transforms, and enlightens, both the giver and receiver. Blessing enables God’s power to take new and more effective forms in our lives and in the world.” ( Bruce Epperly)

This vision of our partnership with God takes time to take root in us. It takes time to trust that the Spirit of God is at work in our world. It takes new eyes to see the outbreaks of beauty in our world. To arrive at such discerning love takes prayer and openness. When we engage in deep reflection and prayer our imaginations can go beyond the boundaries of the world’s expectation. We can imagine ways of living in harmony with our environment and one another. We witness to our faith by our living.

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