

Sermon – 7th Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Scripture Texts: Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11
Sermon preached at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church

Focus Statement: *In the ascension of Jesus, we are committed to a long and sometimes painful path, recognizing that our faith is not about the avoidance of suffering, but about it's healing and redemption.*

Loving God: May my spoken words be faithful to your written Word, and lead us all to better know the living WORD, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Outline:

1. Healing takes time!
 - a. Who has done physical therapy?
 - b. I had to do PT last year for a climbing injury. If you were paying close attention in February 2025, you may have noticed that I wasn't able to lift my arm fully when raising the elements during communion.
 - c. I was surprised by **how much time** PT took.
 - i. I had to get up extra early 2-3 times a week, and spend 2+ hours at the PT place. I also had exercises for the other days.
 - ii. Not how I wanted to be spending my time, but the reality is that healing involves some pain, and it doesn't happen quickly!
 - iii. Even after PT, it was months before my shoulder was functioning normally.
 - d. This recognition of the time and pain involved in healing is helpful, I think, for making sense of the ascension.
2. Ascension – commits us to a long path with a lot of pain!
 - a. The Ascension is weird!
 - i. Jesus floats into the sky and disappears behind a cloud. Such imagery is more common in the time of comics and movies, but it must have been especially strange in Jesus' time.
 - ii. It doesn't really fit into our cosmology today. Heaven isn't a place above the clouds, and there is nothing morally better about above than below.
 - iii. Honestly, that cosmology is more Greek than Hebrew! If we look at ancient Hebrew cosmology, that of Jesus, Heaven isn't a different place, but a different space – where God is. It's more like a different dimension, present everywhere if only we are able to see and access it.
 - b. Still, while a better understanding of cosmology helps with the logistics, it doesn't solve the problem of the ascension.
 - i. Why couldn't Jesus just have brought things to a good conclusion after the resurrection?
 - ii. This introduction of multiple extra stages really stretches out the story of creation, and leaves a lot of extra space for suffering!
 - iii. Think about how we could have avoided things like the international slave trade, nuclear warfare, the holocaust, etc...

- c. If Jesus is crowned king at the crucifixion, and his kingdom is established by his triumph over death in the resurrection, why doesn't he take charge and start setting things right? Sometimes I really feel like God is letting things go on too long!
3. Our faith is not about the avoidance of suffering, but about healing and redemption.
 - a. This is why Peter tells us not to be surprised by suffering.
 - b. This is why we need the long path.
 - i. Suffering and evil are not healed quickly or simply.
 - ii. There is time and pain involved in recognizing what is wrong and what needs to be addressed in order for things to be set right.
 - iii. There is often a cost, particularly for those who have benefited from evil, and repentance is required.
 - c. Good news to sustain us on the way:
 - i. Jesus walks with us. As our Gospel reading from John reminds us, God's glory is revealed in Jesus as he suffers and dies – and in his resurrection that redeems the suffering and death!
 - ii. Jesus prays for us. Again, as John depicts, Jesus intercedes for our protection and our unity, even amid the challenges of this life.
 - iii. Jesus reigns over the world. This is the ultimate good news of the ascension – that Jesus is in heaven and so is not limited to any one place. Rather, he is ruling over our broken world and will bring to completion his work of healing and redemption.

Amen.

Notes:

- Ascension question: Why this multistage plan, with incarnation, death and resurrection, ascension, and eventual return? Why not just fix everything and bring this chapter history to an end?
- Sufferings are part of the story, as 1 Peter makes all too clear. But the point is for them to be redeemed. The hope for all of history is redemption in the way of Jesus, so that he is fully recognized as Lord – not in the sense of power and domination, but in the sense that we all walk his path of redemptive love.
- The way of Jesus is not the avoidance of suffering, but the redemption of it.
- **The ascension is the pathway to kingship without domination – it provides us the opportunity to choose our path, and to be formed in it.**
- Q: In 1 Peter 12, does the word for “test” really speak to evaluation? Or is it more about formation? A: “a putting to proof”. *Note: I found that the best testing was more about formation than evaluation. In the ideal case, I wouldn't need to assign grades, but exams let students recognize what they have learned – and commit to continuing in the learning project.*