

“Our Living Hope”
by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday May 21, 2023
Ascension Sunday

Acts 11:1-11

Ascension Sunday is one of those Sundays that we acknowledge in the church year, and I’ve always recognized as important, but this year it has landed in a different way for me, and I hope I can share a little of what this day celebrates.

I don’t know what you do on Mondays, but Monday mornings I start working on the bulletin and service for Sunday.

I will read the texts, and think about them, read commentaries, and listen to sermons.

I heard a sermon on 1 Peter 1 that made me think.

The context of 1 Peter is a church that is being persecuted and suffering for their faith. They are going through all kinds of trials and griefs.

And so, to encourage the church Peter writes:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By His great mercy He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”

The living hope of the church was the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul as he is writing to the church in Ephesus point to the same thing. Paul says: ***“I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers,”***

What does Paul pray for this church that he loves?

"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power for us who believe, according to the working of His great power. God put this power to work in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

Paul's prayer is that we will come to know the hope that we have and the glorious inheritance that is ours, and the immeasurable power at work in us, which is the power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of the Father in His ascension.

When we understand Jesus' resurrection and ascension, then we start to see the incredible implications, the unfailing hope that is ours, our glorious inheritance, and how everything is changed.

What is changed is nothing less than heaven and earth. All of creation has been held in bondage to suffering and decay. But creation is being restored because Jesus was raised from the dead and has ascended to the throne of God.

There is a new heaven and a new earth on its way, that is coming into being even now.

All that was lost in the garden, where God walked with us in the cool of the day, and all of creation was good; is being restored.

And we are being restored, we are born into a living hope in Jesus, and a glorious inheritance that is secure because Jesus is raised and ascended, above every power and every name in heaven and on earth.

We are baptized into Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension.

We are joined to Jesus through the Holy Spirit and the life that was at work in Him, is at work in us.

Jesus is our hope, He is our life, for this life and for eternity.
So, what do we need fear?

Our outward natures are fading away.

We face problems and trials, griefs and hardships, but we know this day who is in charge.

We know today who the power above every power is, and who is running the show. We know that Jesus is going to return, and we are accountable to Him.

And we know, not only is Jesus on the throne, bringing all things to completion, and setting all things right, but Jesus prays for us.
Jesus intercedes for us.

Jesus prays for you; Jesus prays for me.
We are on the heart and mind of Jesus our Lord.

In a few minutes we are going to celebrate communion.
We are going to take bread and wine and remember that Jesus gave his life for us. He sacrificed himself for us, so that might be joined to Him, not just in death, but in resurrection life and ascension.

And so, we would know this life is not meaningless.
It is not in the words of MacBeth:

“a walking shadow; a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Life is filled with goodness and beauty, which our sin has marred, and corrupted, but this world is being restored, and we are part of the new creation.

We are beloved children of the rightful King and ruler, who has ascended to His throne, and fills all things.

We are His ambassadors; we are His hands and feet, and His power and Spirit are at work in us and through us.

And so, I pray with the Apostle Paul that we might be grasped by the truth: ***“I ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make us intelligent and discerning in knowing Jesus personally, our eyes focused and clear, so that we can see exactly what it is He is calling us to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life He has for His followers, oh, the utter extravagance of His work in us who trust Him—endless energy, boundless strength! All this energy issues from Christ: God raised Him from death and set Him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from His rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ’s body, in which He speaks and acts, by which He fills everything with His presence.” (Ephesians 1: 15-23 The Message)***

God grasp us with your truth, that we might be bold followers of Jesus, our risen and reigning Lord. Amen.