Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Sunday after Ascension
May 17, 2026
rmcneely+

Ye men of Galilee,
Why stand ye gazing up into Heaven?

The Church celebrated the Ascension on Thursday.
That brought to an end, the 40 day Season of EasterTide
And with it, the conclusion of our 5 month long journey
In which we walked with Jesus.
Through the Gospels
We have relived His Earthly Life:
From His birth
Throughout His three year Earthly Ministry
His Crucifixion and His Resurrection
Until His dramatic Ascension to the Father.
To a place we cannot go….yet.

While the Ascension on Thursday
Closed the door on our study of Jesus' life on Earth,
it opened the door
To Pentecost
To Trinity
And to the long Summer Survey of Essential Christian
Doctrine
Of the Trinity Season.

It is the perpetual cycle of the Christian Kalendar
That has guided Christians for hundreds of years.

Luke's Ascension Gospel takes us back to Jerusalem
It has been 40 days since His Resurrection.
He has appeared among the Apostles several times.
But hundreds of people have seen Him
in His Resurrected Form.

This day He leads them to Bethany, a short walk from Jerusalem
They could not know it,
But it would be the last time they saw Him on this Earth.

As he lifted up His hands and blessed them
He rose into the clouds beyond their sight.
Ending the most influential earthly existence of any man
In the history of the world.

We can imagine that they stood there in silence
Stunned,
struggling to comprehend what they had just seen.
Bewildered, lost
Saddened
Their dear Friend and Brother was suddenly gone from them.
They had been through a lot together.
What could His departure mean for them?
What were they to do now?
What was their mission?
Surely this could not be the end.
In Luke's Ascension account in Acts, there were two men clothed in white robes. One asked them: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven?

It would take them some time to recognize that it was a beginning.

What does it mean for us
7400 miles and 2000 years away?
This mysterious event is difficult for us to understand.
Why? Why did Jesus have to leave this Earth?
How? How could it have happened?
What did God have in mind for us?

All questions for which we have no solid answers.
It is the Ascension that gives all of it eternal meaning.

It is by the Ascension that Jesus marked the pathway to our eternal life.

I want to let you in on a little secret.
You already know that here at St Thomas, the music is an integral part of the liturgy.
But what you could not know
Is that we have maintained the selection of the Hymns
That Archbishop Provence established years ago.
He never missed the opportunity of a hymn that advanced the liturgy of the day.
That is why two of the hymns today
Speak to another aspect of the Ascension,
the notion of royal crowns,
And direct us to the Ascension as the coronation of Jesus
As King and Ruler of our lives and souls.
Exchanging His crown of thorns and sacrifice
For His crown of Gold and His perpetual Royal role.

We are encouraged to think about why God chose to draw Jesus home to Him rather than to perpetually walk the Earth.

Perhaps the answer resides in the Gospel for this week.
As in the last three week's Gospels
this one too is from the St John's account
of the Farewell Discourse;

In which Jesus tells us that He must go
In order that the Holy Ghost
Whom He names "the Comforter",
to indwell in us.
And certainly, the power of Jesus/the Holy Ghost residing within
Mankind, each of us forever;
Far outpaced the power of His remaining on Earth

However, we can't know the answers to the why and the how of the Ascension.

The Ascension is a foretaste of what is to come for us.

Here is the take away for today's Sermon:
The Ascension is the conclusion of a three part event
That we should view as a single occurrence
Whenever we consider the crucifixion
We should immediately think of the
Crucifixion
The resurrection, and
The ascension
As one.

Here's why:

The crucifixion was but the sadistic murder
of an innocent man
by mob violence
Until the resurrection,
And the Resurrection was the vindication of all that Jesus said and did,
But nothing more.

Until the Ascension
Which was the defeat of evil,
The defeat of death.
It is by virtue of the Ascension that life transcends death
And without all three,
The crucifixion
The resurrection, and
The ascension: It doesn't happen.

Without the ascension,
Jesus demonstrated the power He had to bring the dead back to this life three times:
Lazarus
The son of the Widow of Nain
The Temple official's daughter
Were all restored to this life.
Mysterious and marvelous miracles
But restoring the dead back to this life only to die in this life later
Is hardly the same as eternity in the next life.

I want to tell you the story from 1911
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Morrison
Were crossing the Atlantic
returning to New York to retire
after decades
Of missionary service to the people of Africa.
They had no pension in the days before social security
Their health was failing
They were worried and discouraged.
And also aboard the ship amongst great
Fanfare and celebrity
Former President Theodore Roosevelt was returning
From a hunting trip in Africa
And no one paid any attention to the missionary couple.
The couple watched the attention lavished upon the former president and his entourage.
And Henry said to his wife "something is wrong"
We have given our lives in service to God in Africa
For all these years
And no one cares a thing about us
Here this man comes back from a hunting trip
And everyone makes such a fuss about him
But no one gives a fig about us.

When the ship docked in New York
The press photographers were there to record the event
The mayor greeted the former President
There was a band and a great cheering crowd.
And the Morrisons anonymously slipped off the ship and found a cheap apartment on the east side.

That night Henry said to his wife
"I can't take this
God is not treating us fairly"
His wife was a good priest's wife and she replied,
"Why don't you go into the other room
And tell that to the Lord".
Henry returned a little later
But his face and demeanor were different
His wife asked him, what happened dear?
"The Lord settled it with me.
I told him how bitter I was that the President should receive this
Tremendous homecoming
When not one person met us at the dock upon our return home
And when I finished complaining
It seemed as though the Lord had put his hand on my shoulder and said
"you're not home . . . yet"

You see my dear friends
We are not meant to be here
We are aliens in this foreign land
The earth is not our home
We are as ambassadors,
Pilgrims journeying to our heavenly home.

The short and fleeting time that we have here on this planet
This island in the universe,

Is but a miniscule portion of our journey.
It is a time to prepare
To sculpt and to mold our souls
To shed our sinful ways
To learn and adhere to the will of God
So that we may go home.
Where we will know life
In all its richness and fullness

Jesus has made it all possible
His bodily ascension has proved the way

Jesus told the apostles on the night of His betrayal

Let not your heart be troubled
Ye Believe in God
Believe also in me
In my Father's house are many mansions
If it were not so, I would have told you.
I go to prepare a place for you
That where I am
So ye may be also. Jn 14:1

With the Ascension
For the first time
People were able to see death
As going home
Going home to the heavenly place
Going home to their heavenly Father.

Going home
And entering into the presence of their Creator
Where there will be joy
Where there will be peace
Where there will be love

Sadly there are those who seem to believe that life on this planet
Is all there is
Doesn't life take on a different meaning to those for whom death still is final?

My dear friends in Christ,
The question of us, is not "How do we ascend?"
That has already been accomplished

The question is; 'What pulls us down?'
What is the gravity that holds us down:
What do we need to let go of:
Is it
Pride
Fear
Anger
Greed
Self worship
Is it;
The need to be in control; ignoring the will of God
Self righteousness, jealousy, pride?
Is it
the chains of perfectionism,
the need to prove we are enough?
Is it indifference or apathy?
Gravity takes many forms. What is the gravity that denies us Jesus' Ascension?

The gravity that keeps us down is not our creation or the circumstances or our lives.
You see . . . Newton, was wrong;
Gravity is not around us
It is within us.

As we begin to examine our lives and identify the places of gravity
We cannot despair
The very things that hold us down
Also point us the way to ascension
Our participation in Jesus' ascension begins not by looking up.
But by looking within.
Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up unto heaven?

Our citizenship is of Heaven

And we are not home . . . yet.