

A Lectionary for Ascension and Pentecost

May 2021

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, whose only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven: May our hearts and minds also there ascend, and with him continually dwell; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

—*Book of Common Prayer*

Psalm

As the deer desires the water brooks,
so longs my soul for you, O God.
My soul is athirst for God, even for the living God;
when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?..
O send out your light and your truth, that they may lead me,
and bring me to your holy hill, and to your dwelling;
That I may go to the altar of God, even to the God of my joy and gladness;
and on the harp will I give thanks to you, O God, my God.
Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul,
and why are you so disquieted within me?
O put your trust in God,
for I will yet give him thanks, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

—Psalm 42:1-2 and 43:3-6

Readings

Jesus said, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

—John 16:7, ESV

Like any relationship, [our relationship with God] has a history, it develops....It all happens as with a book: in order to uncover a new page, you have to turn—and therefore hide and, in a way, abandon—the preceding one. With God, this movement has no end, since he is infinite. The divine intimacy that overwhelmed us gives way little by little to a kind of dissatisfaction; we hear something like a call to go farther but without knowing in what direction. Everything happens as though the

Lord stopped showing up at our appointment with him; or, more precisely, we are the ones who no longer show up. We stayed at the same place, while the Lord walked further on.

—Dysmas de Lassus

The Beaver's voice sank into silence and it gave one or two very mysterious nods. Then signaling to the children to stand as close around it as they possibly could, so that their faces were actually tickled by its whiskers, it added in a low whisper—"They say Aslan is on the move."

—C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

Reflection

Last Thursday was Ascension Day. As I read Luke's account of the event and of Pentecost, I found myself wondering about those in-between days. The disciples had experienced grief and horror over the death of their Teacher, and then—wonder of wonders!—they experienced the resurrected Jesus. For 40 days, they ate with Him, spoke with Him, listened to Him, learned from Him. And then, He disappeared from their sight, ascended to the right hand of God, where they could no longer see or touch or hear Him. How must that have felt? They no longer had their sensory experience of Him, only memory and faith—the memory of their resurrected Lord, the faith that He would send the promised Comforter.

Like the disciples, I am in an in-between season. I, too, find myself living in a place of memory and faith. One thread of my grief over my mom's death isn't about my mom at all; it's grief over the lifting of the palpable presence of God that I knew in the days of her dying and the weeks that followed. I no longer sense God in the way that I did then. We lived for weeks under the shadow of His wing, and though it was hard, it was also holy and beautiful, and I long for that sense of His nearness to remain. But He has lifted His wing, and now I find myself, a bit dazed, sitting in the sun with a breeze on my face and the sound of quiet water gurgling nearby. I am grateful for the sun and the breeze and the water—all of them symbols of God's presence—but I long not for symbols but for the thing to which the symbols point. I long to *feel* the presence of God as I did just a few weeks ago.

Like the disciples, I must learn to be with my Lord in a new way. Or perhaps it's not such a new way after all. For I must walk by faith and not by feeling—which is a very old way of being with God. It involves prayer and Scripture, worship and fellowship, praise and thanksgiving, fasting and feasting, and paying attention so I don't miss the gifts He is giving. The newness will mostly consist in recognizing those gifts and receiving them as such—as the disciples did on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured upon them.

For them to receive the Helper, Jesus had to bodily leave them. But His Ascension was not

abandonment; rather, it made possible the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. It was a gift. In a similar way, the lifting of His wings that I've sensed these past weeks is not abandonment. It, too, is a gift. It is like the turning of the page in a storybook: an invitation to continue the journey. Like Aslan, my brave Captain is on the move. He leads His people ever upward and inward, deeper into the country of our true Home. And so He lifts His wing that I might long for Him as the deer longs for the water brooks, that I might seek Him and follow where He leads.

Benediction

May our infinite intimate God grant us grace to be like the disciples on Pentecost: quick to recognize and receive His gifts, quick to hear and heed His call. May we thirst for His presence and be satisfied. And may His light and His truth lead us further up and further into His kingdom. Amen.

Sources

Psalms 42 and 43 from The New Coverdale Psalter ©2019 The Anglican Church in North America

Dysmas de Lassas quoted in *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise* by Robert Cardinal Sarah

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis

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