

KING OF THE WORLD

Psalm 47; Acts 1:1-11

Today, the last Sunday of Eastertide, we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord. Ascension Day (actually last Thursday) is the day we celebrate the resurrected Christ's exaltation to rule over the whole earth as God. Ascension Day is about worshipping Jesus as God, ruler over the whole earth, Jesus as King of the World!

So what, you may ask. We know that Jesus rules. What is the big deal that we need to have a special day to celebrate Jesus as ruler of all? Ascension Day celebrates that which we believe – when we stand to say the confessions of our faith – that Jesus Christ is Lord.

It is a big deal when you think of the many disciples throughout the ages who have taken great risks to proclaim Jesus as Lord. When the early disciples refused to obey the civil authorities and stop preaching about Jesus, they proclaimed Jesus rules. When martyrs refused to bow down to worship the Roman emperor, they sang Jesus Christ is Lord. When church reformers bucked the church's authority, they said Jesus Christ alone is head of the church. When the Reformed church issued the Barmen Declaration in the midst of the Nazi regime, they stared down Hitler to declare Jesus Christ supreme ruler. When Quakers refuse to serve in the armed forces, it is because they believe Jesus Christ, not the military, had ultimate power. When church members endure persecution for taking political justice stands, it is because we believe Jesus Christ rules according to God's Kingdom principles. So what's the big deal? Ascension Day is about Jesus Christ ruling as God, Lord of all. And that is everything to all who call themselves Christian.

For many decades Ascension Day was not observed, forgotten by much of the church. TO observe Ascension Day is to place Jesus front and center. And...for many, that is uncomfortable. You see, it is easier to put Jesus Christ in a box on the highest shelf, to be taken down on Christmas and Easter, or in times of distress. We have displaced Jesus. We have knocked Christ off the throne. The cosmos has moved into center place, leaving no room for Jesus Christ as the focus. It is easy for us to get caught in the things of this world, forgetting our focus, dethroning Jesus.

Without Christ ruling the world, we can seat our own gods. Everyone knows that America rules the world. Right? So when following Christ hinders the American way, our nationalism can search Scripture for passages that uphold our capital gains and ignore the Bible's prophetic pronouncements that judge us as an unjust society. Holding a flag-draped Bible allows many to replace Jesus as King of the world, so that their own vested interests can rule. Of course Jesus Christ is head of the church. But the days are growing more numerous when we wonder if the ruler of the world is Jesus or whatever faction has the most political power to enable it to scramble onto the throne of God!

Surely, we say, Jesus still rules the hearts of individual church members – or does he? Consider this scenario: When was the last time you went to buy a new home and your Christian realtor said, "You need to buy this less expensive house in a poorer neighborhood than you can afford so you will have enough money to give to the poor?" And – you bought it? Aren't we more likely to stretch to buy the house in the BMW neighborhood than we are to buy the decent house next-door to a single mother of multiple children, who drives an older model Ford Escort? Do you care that it is in an integrated neighborhood that is looking to be revitalized and that you may have the gifts needed to help turn things around. After all, we do ministry at the church; we don't want to take God's Kingdom ministry home with us! Truth be told, we would rather have

the comfort of doing what WE want with our own kind and our own hard-earned money. So from Jesus Christ exalted to rule over the world, to ruler of the nations, to the head of the church, to the king of hearts, Christ has been shoved off the throne of God into smaller and smaller domains until it seems Christ really is not ruler of anything anymore; we are. No wonder we would just as soon forget Ascension Day. We would rather be God!

Of course, we know that is not possible, there is another way. We need to reverse our movement. Instead of bringing Christ down to our level so we can rule, we can raise Christ up so in the humility of our reliance upon his resurrection power, we can be exalted to participate in the very work of God in the world. Why else are we here today, in worship? We have come because somewhere deep inside we know we need Christ to save us. We have come because we are Easter people, in need of the resurrected Christ. We have come because we have tried to do it ourselves and have failed. We come because we have admitted our need for God. We have come because the transforming power through Jesus Christ has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. We have come because Jesus humbled himself before God so that even as he was lifted up on a cross of sin, Jesus submitted himself to the work of God birthing a new creation. By God's resurrection power at work through Jesus Christ, we have been born anew, made new creations, free of hopelessness, free of fear, freed from death, freed from sin. Today, as Easter people, freed to live life in complete dependence upon the love and grace of God shown for us through Jesus Christ, we can stand like Christ, against the forces of evil and proclaim, "Enough! By God, enough!"

For these reasons we are here to praise God, to give thanks, to ask forgiveness for allowing sin to cause us to stumble. We are here to exalt Jesus Christ as Lord of all. We are here to worship God as God of ALL our life. And we submit our lives to God, as we practice how to live out our faith in the world. We are here because we do not want to keep Jesus away, but rather, we open ourselves to God's resurrection power – the power to raise us to new life, to breathe life into our souls, so that we become servants in the world, vessels of the Spirit, and participants in the continuing work of God struggling to birth the New Creation for all people. As we enthrone Christ, we are lifted up, exalted into the very heart of God.

So I invite you now, let's stand to exalt Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, of our church, and of the whole world. I invite you to confess Jesus as Lord in these simple words: Jesus Christ is Lord! Shout it out: Jesus Christ is Lord!

As we sing the next hymn, I invite any who have not been baptized, who are being called by God to give your whole life to Jesus Christ, come as you are led.