

GOSPEL MESSAGE

May 9, 2024

ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

A Hard Blessing

She chopped deeper into her friend's thicket of grief and fear with these words: "This is a hard blessing for you, a privilege you never imagined or wished for; losing everything you've gained is an unhopd-for freedom few people receive." The winnowing encouragement pressed beyond the shocking rupture in his settled life. Bereft, one word commanded every spark in his mind, every contraction of his heart: *gone*.

What is there left to believe in when loss hollows your soul? How can courage be found? How can one imagine, let alone trust, that there will again be joy when the tomorrow you hoped for disappears like a wilderness trail after sunset?

Whatever can be made of the ascension account told in Luke and retold in Acts, there is no missing the severity of loss experienced by the disciples. It was a breath-hardening stupor that descended, making senseless Jesus' community of ragtag vagabonds. At the same time, the disciples were challenged to carry on anew after their Lord's strange departure. Even as there was grief and fear for the disciples, there was also "great joy" (Luke 24:52). Despite loss, still there was "power from on high" (Luke 24:49) and the Holy Spirit to accompany them (Acts 1:8). But, we can imagine, these gifts of joy and power were not gained without struggle and uncertainty: a hard blessing.

The last marvelous word of wonder in this Jesus story does not settle on his departure but on his arrival; not from whom he has gone but to whom he comes; not on the emptiness of loss but in the wholeness found in being claimed by God's love. The enduring wonder of Jesus' divine contradictions is not discovered in a supernatural flash—"Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" (Acts 1:11)—but rather in the daily witness of God's grace and hope, which abound "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

From sundaysandseasons.com.

Copyright © 2024 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.