

Seventh Sunday of Easter; Ascension of our Lord (Observed); May 12, 2024

Psalm 47

“From Crown of Thorns to Crown of Glory”

**All you peoples, clap your hands!  
Shout to God! Sing a loud song!**

**Yes, the LORD Most High is awesome.  
He is the great King over all the earth!  
He subdues peoples under us  
and nations under our feet.  
He chooses our inheritance for us.  
It is the pride of Jacob, whom he loves.  
God has ascended with a joyful shout.  
The LORD goes up with the sound of the ram’s horn.**

**Make music for God! Make music!  
Make music for our King! Make music!  
For God is the King of all the earth.  
Make music for him with a wise son.**

**God reigns as king over the nations.  
God is seated on his holy throne.  
The nobles of the people come together  
as the people of the God of Abraham.  
Yes, the shields of the earth belong to God.  
He is greatly exalted.**

When she was a little girl, Millie’s birthdays were special, as they are for any child. Candles, cake, balloons, bouncy balls, playmates, and presents. Her birthdays were the highlight of her young life. Then, gradually, with a few exceptions at mile markers 16, 18, and 21, her big days got less and less big. Until, by age thirty, she preferred almost to forget them.

But then, much later, her birthdays became special again. Because later, much later, each one was a victory. She had far outlived life expectancy. The number of friends still around to celebrate with her was small, but now her family’s fourth generation was there to help her blow out that prairie fire on top of cake each year: 95, 97, 100 candles. Her birthdays had become beautiful and special celebrations again.

This is also the pattern of the Christian Church’s celebration of Jesus’ ascension. Or, at least, I hope it will be. In the early years of the Church, the Ascension of our Lord was a special and big day – along with Easter and Pentecost, one of the three peaks on the Church’s calendar. And then, gradually, the celebration of Jesus’ ascension became less celebrated, partly giving way to Christmas, and partly a casualty of falling midweek in a Monday-to-Friday world. Now the Ascension has almost slipped entirely from the Church’s mind. Many congregations, oddly, worship on secular holidays like Thanksgiving or New Year’s but hold no public worship at all on the Feast of Ascension. (And that included this one.)

But the Christian Church is old now, in her final days. It is time for her to return to celebrating this day with all her heart, to see it as a victory. We still aren’t doing it on the right day, and hopefully that will

change here at Trinity sometime soon, but could we celebrate our Lord's ascension today with all our hearts? Could we see it as a day of joy, a celebration of victory? Why don't we go back to that now, in our old age, in the Church's final days?

Because Jesus' return to the heavenly home does rank right up there with every other stop on his road map of salvation. When he cried out on Calvary, "It is finished!" Jesus meant what he said. Done were sin and Satan; done were death and hell – done, done, and done, the strife over, the battle won. For good, for keeps and forever.

Our salvation was finished. Yet, there was still so much more to do. And as he instructed his disciples, Jesus was ready to head home and follow through. So in essence, on Ascension Day, Jesus changed his base of operation. Going from here to there, from *terra firma* to celestial paradise – from crown of thorns to crown of glory! And as we watch him rise, together we praise the Lord who reigns on high.

I've never met a king. Not even anyone nicknamed "king," like Elvis or Hank Aaron. The closest I've come royalty is eating at Burger King and Dairy Queen. Have you ever met a real king? Probably not. But we know what they look like: the royal throne and royal robes, the scepter and slippers. These are what tell his subjects, "I rule you."

Jesus was different because he was a different kind of king. Go back to Bethlehem where the holiest of the holy was born lowliest of the lowly. Go back to Calvary, where the sinless Son of God was roughed up and refused, beaten and bloodied. Mistreated as if he were someone worse than Public Enemy Number One.

No, as he went about preaching, teaching, and reaching out to the last, the lost, and the least, Jesus didn't look or even act like a king. But that changed the instant he ascended! **God has ascended with a joyful shout. The LORD goes up with the sound of the ram's horn. Make music for God! Make music! For God is the King of all the earth.** It is a hail of hosannas, a groundswell of adoration, a wave of praises, and shouts of joy: Jesus is home again! Jesus is home again!

There's a feeling here that ought not be lost on us still standing on this side of eternity. I mean: consider the pomp and circumstance we shower on the famous (and even not-so-famous) who do little more than entertain us. Last week, I read a news story praising a famous singer for singing one song on stage while pregnant. I'm sure that's hard, but my mom was raising three little children while she carried me. We praise athletes – even golfers who tap a little ball with a stick so that it rolls into the hole. Thousands surround them and wave and applaud and cheer: "Get in the hole! Get in the hole!" What thin things people praise each other for! Consider how easily we praise, and then how little we praise Jesus. Consider what he should be hearing from us. He deserves the hero's praise to end all heroes' praise.

Because, certainly, Jesus has gone from the crown of thorns to the crown of glory, every step and stop in between, for us. Yes, he came to his creation and accomplished all his Father commanded. With his perfect life and his one-time, good-for-all-eternity sacrifice, Jesus roundly defeated Satan, resoundingly destroyed death and soundly silenced sin forever.

No wonder the Psalmist encourages us: **All you peoples, clap your hands! Shout to God! Sing a loud song!** Praise God that the victim of Calvary is the victor of heaven. Praise God that the servant is Savior, the laughed-at is Lord, the dead is now living, and sitting on the throne of heaven. Praise God that he is there

now, watching over us, watching out for us, pleading and interceding for our forgiveness, ruling us with grace and truth, ruling all for our God.

And this is why we praise the Lord who reigns on high! We give all glory, laud, and honor to our King who's got the whole world in his hands, and at the same time has our best interests at heart! And since Jesus has so surely overcome evil with good, darkness with light, and sadness with delight, he has gone from crown of thorns to crown of glory. So we praise him not only for reigning on high, but we also praise him as the Lord who rules the earth.

About Jesus' ascension we know many details clearly: the way he assembled his disciples there on the Mount of Olives, how he delivered the Great Commission only to disappear suddenly up and out of sight. Gone so quickly. But even then his followers weren't all alone. Sure, Jesus was out of sight. But he would never be out of reach.

Because as paradoxical as it seems, Jesus had to leave his disciples in one place in order to return to an even greater dimension of power. You see, as Jesus ascended heavenward to the highest heights, he was also turning loose his power on the whole world. Now people wouldn't just meet him in one place at a time, but they'd meet everywhere people go: north, south, east, and west.

So you and I are still here, but because he ascended we meet our risen Lord right where we are now, and anywhere his Word and sacraments are present. So by all means we ought to praise him anytime, anywhere we worship him: **For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.** The poet wrote: "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world." But the way things are in this world, we need to keep not only repeating that, but remembering the basis for its truth.

Tornadoes and terrorism and tyrants, public indifference and private apathy. Maybe it's time to throw up our hands in surrender...

Only here comes the Ascension of our Lord, telling us to do something different: come what may, Jesus rules today, and he rules tomorrow, too. So if you're going to throw up your hands, don't do it in surrender, but in praise. Praise the Lord and sound his trumpets. Ascension points heavenward and heaven in our real home. This is not all there is; the best is yet to be.

We're still sinners living in such a sadly sinful world. But rest assured: Jesus gets the last word. Nobody and nothing can overcome us, no one and nothing can turn us out or turn us down – not so long as we're living by grace through faith; not so long as he's ruling us with his power, presence, and peace.

Maybe that's why Ascension hymns and psalms are so upbeat and uplifting: because Ascension emphatically announces and pronounces in no uncertain terms: Jesus is King of this world, and we are his people. He's got too much love and much blood invested in us to let us slip through his nail-pierced hands, to ever leave us alone or on our own.

We are following Jesus from pain and peril to Paradise. From the crown of thorns to the crown of glory, he is King of kings and Lord of lords. From crown of thorns to crown of glory, we praise the one who reigns in heaven. From crown of thorns to crown of glory, we praise the one who reigns over all the earth. **All you peoples, clap your hands! Shout to God! Sing a loud song! Amen.**