

Easter7\_YrA\_060114\_mcr  
All Saints Episcopal Church

*Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?*

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Time, time time. There are all kinds of time. There is a time to get up in the morning. There is a time to go to bed. There is a time to go to school and a time to come home. There is a time to work, and there is a time to play...

"Some people say that time is in a line, but I wonder what that would look like? Oh, wait a minute. What is this? *(show small end of cord in between fingers)*

"Time. Time in a line. This is time in a line. Look at this. Here is the beginning. It is the newest part. It is just being born. It is brand new. Now look. *(Pull out cord slowly while speaking.)*

"Look. It is getting older. The part that was new is now getting old. I wonder how long time goes. Does it go forever? Could there ever be an ending? *(The end of the cord drops.)*

"It ended. Look at the ending. *(Pick up the cord and look at it.)*

*(Hold the two ends and look at them.)* "The beginning that was so new at the beginning now is old. The ending is the new part now. We have a beginning that is like an ending and an ending that is like a beginning.

"Do you know what the Church did? *(Tie the two ends/beginnings together.)* They tied the ending that was like a beginning, and the beginning that was like an ending together, so we would always remember that for every ending there is a beginning and for every beginning there is an ending." *(Godly Play, The Circle of the Church Year)*

In Godly Play, the lesson on the Circle of the Church Year names three great times during the year: the mystery of Christmas, the mystery of Easter and the mystery of Pentecost. Along the way, people realized that it was possible to walk through

those three great mysteries without even knowing what's there. So the Church decided it was important to set aside times to get ready for them.

So now we have four weeks of Advent to get ready for the mystery of Christmas. And we have six weeks of Lent to get ready for the mystery of Easter. And Easter is "so great that it keeps on going. You can't keep it in one Sunday. It overflows and goes on" for a total of seven Sundays - a whole season! *(GP)*

During the weeks of Easter, "the people met Jesus in a new way. He had died on the cross, and that was very sad. But they kept meeting him. Somehow Jesus was still with them, as he is still with us." *(GP)*

Then something wonderful happened. The Apostles were outside of Jerusalem with Jesus, who was still with them in this new way. And, according to Luke's gospel and the Acts of the Apostles (this morning's lesson), they saw him go up.

'Going up' refers to Jesus' ascension into heaven, the feast day of which was observed this past Thursday - 40 days after Easter and 10 days before the Day of Pentecost. Was it a literal event, or was it the only way Luke could imagine how Jesus left his Apostles? Who knows?

This 'event' has been imagined in countless ways, particularly in the realm of religious art. I googled images of the Ascension, and I have to say that, a great deal of it is unbelievably tacky, in my humble opinion. Many of the images show Jesus suspended in the air, with or without clouds, and a crowd of onlookers who are either cowering in fear, looking up in awe, or even one where someone was trying to hold on to one of Jesus' ankles! Sometimes he is angled, as if he has been launched like a rocket. In one, I swear, Jesus has on a space suit.

Icons often describe the ascension with Jesus sitting on the heavenly throne, with angels on either side. The problem with some of them is that you can't really see the throne, so it looks as though Jesus might be on a swing instead. One bizarre painting depicts just Jesus' head with no body at all, surrounded by rays of light.

There's even an ascension craft kit you can get for the kids. It comes with a little foam Jesus cutout, a blue Dixie Cup with clouds on it, and a large foam cloud with a smiley-face sun peaking out at the corner of it and a bible verse written on it. A string is attached at the bottom of the cloud that runs down through the Dixie Cup

and attaches at the other end to Jesus' head. And when you pull the string, Jesus goes up into the cup. Poof - the ascension!

But the most amazing paintings, icons, stain glass windows and illuminated manuscripts (to me) show only Jesus' feet, dangling below the clouds - the only part of him left visible as he goes up. All of these, done in faith, but hard to translate into oil and canvas or otherwise.

In Luke's gospel (which is read on Ascension Day), the story of the ascension is the end of the story, but in Acts, it is the very beginning of the story. And, in Luke's gospel, the ascension takes place on Easter afternoon, just after the encounter between Jesus and two disciples on the road to Emmaus. But in the first chapter of Acts, it takes place forty days *after* Easter. Although I am pretty sure that Luke didn't know about Godly Play, I'm thinking that maybe Luke is telling us something important about Jesus' departure: that it is both an ending and a beginning.

The ascension is, of course, an ending. Jesus will not walk the earth again. He will no longer perform miracles or heal the sick. This is goodbye. The Jesus story in Luke's gospel has come to an end.

But... when we turn to Acts, the same scene, although with different timing, is the beginning of another story—the story of the church. Now Luke seems to take at it from a different point of view. Now the emphasis is on *what to do now*. In both scenes, Jesus "opens the scriptures," just as he had done for the two followers on the road to Emmaus, giving final instructions. But in Acts, when his disciples ask about the schedule of future events, Jesus reminds them "It is not for you to know the times..." The suggestion is that the business of the newborn church will not be to spend its time speculating about the end time (as too many religious groups still do), but to get about the continuing work of the kingdom.

It's significant that after Jesus is 'taken up' in a cloud and the onlookers stare at those feet dangling below the cloud, two men in white appear and say, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" The implication is, '*don't just stand there, do something!*' And so the story of the church begins.

So the ending is also the beginning. The ascension of Jesus is, like Pentecost - our next great time, which we celebrate next week - the birthing of the church in the

world, a church that is called not to just stand there, looking up, but is called to get about the work that Jesus began. What ends with Jesus begins with the Spirit empowering us to be the church, to be the continuing presence of Christ in the world.

Life is full of both endings and beginnings. We are ending a school year and beginning a time of rest and recreation. We are ending a season of knowing Jesus in a different form, and beginning a season of fulfilling our call as followers of the way. Jesus may be gone, but we are still in the world. Jesus' works are now in our hands and Jesus is counting on us to be his presence in his absence.

Will we carry on as we have been asked to do? In the end is our beginning...

Here are a few of the pieces of 'art' to which I was referring:



