

**Sermon Notes:** May 12, 2024

**Focus:** Ascension (Year B)

[All Readings](#)

Ascension Day commemorates Jesus going up to heaven *after* he walked around post Easter. Also, Ascension Day is the last big day before Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 2024. I want to help us look *up* to Jesus in heaven and look *around* to Jesus among us.

Jesus' Ascension draws earth up toward heaven while Pentecost brings heaven to the earth. When I think about huge ideas like the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost and the Ascension of Jesus to heaven, I return to my standard preacher question, so what? What relevance does this have?

**Think global, act local** is a well-worn aphorism from the environmental care movement. We can also apply this to our spiritual life. We need the big heavenly moments, and we need kindness and caring for each other. Specific to church, we can let the big movements of scripture and liturgy inspire us and give us strength to act locally.

***Church broad “global” strokes***

Lent - prepares you to serve

Easter - encourages you to persevere

Ascension - shakes you loose

Pentecost - fires you up

**Now Local** What are you going to do with any peace in church you find? This is precious and not to be treated lightly by us. One of the ways we wash away our valuable peace is “multitasking the soul.” When you find your compassion growing, the natural impulse is to go big. You want to solve hunger, global conflict, church vitality, and your family’s well-being. A vital spiritual life is taking small bites, one at a time, and staying focused. Carrying the world, even if only in your heart, can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue.

**UNfocused, UNlocal media world.** Modern news puts our focus into a high-speed blender. Turn on the TV or your phone and Look! tornadoes, war, car wrecks, college students, and elections... but wait also look here at this terrible thing happening in Washington DC, after this commercial break.

I don't talk about Gaza much, but it has seared a hole in my heart. I care a lot about what is happening in Gaza, at college campuses, divestment protests, and the status of the hostages on both sides. These interactions become unfocused from two directions:

**From the left**, “but what about the Congo?” Don't you care about them? You might be racist unless you talk about Myanmar, the Congo, and Israel

in the exact same breath. If I bite this hook, I am left with unfocused, unproductive compassion fatigue. Individuals cannot carry the world's burdens, but they can find a few global things to focus on collectively and locally. Like it or not, I am at the Oakland port every time there is a call to action. It's not much, but it is more than paralysis.

**From the right**, "Gaza's leaders are all billionaires...take that!" "You can't oppose the war unless you're antisemitic." And my favorite, latest one is from interviews on the street- "college kids need to learn better manners, or maybe they deserve to get shot." The snipers that were on the roofs of Ohio State still feel surreal to me. I highly recommend the ["The Day the Sixties Died"](#) documentary on PBS that addresses the Kent State Shootings, which has a very similar vibe to today. (You might have to have a PBS passport, but this link is free)

***No one** of us can be cleared eyed and compassionate **all the time for everything**. Look up to heaven where Jesus is and take courage. Look at your fellow pilgrims (they are the bearers of Jesus' image) and find strength with them for the road ahead.*

**God is the only multitasker** God can be two things at once.

*An immanent, God-with-us, walk-with-me-talk-with-me God.*

God makes us more willing to be curious about the ones who are right next to us "immananting" holiness.

*A transcendent, huge God*

God reminds us of our smallness. A transcendent one shows us humility in our smallness. Who are we to think of ourselves as separate or better from our fellow small pilgrims when God is so much bigger than any of us can conceive?

**Look up and around** Where we look is important. When we look *up* to the Ascendent/Transcendent God above and walk *with* the immanent God we are doubly equipped. We find an expansive creation, a big God, and wide-open potential. One-on-one compassion and connection are possible. Ascension and Pentecost remind us that our family, church, and community are more than just a collection of individuals. We are citizens of a heaven which resides in and above us.

**Todd**