

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Seventh Sunday in Easter | Sunday After Ascension – Year B

RCL Readings – Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

ACNA Readings – Acts 1:15-26; Psalm 68:1-20; 1 John 5:6-15; John 17:11b-19

Introduction. This Sunday is the seventh in the Easter season. Some communities will celebrate the Feast of Ascension on Sunday. The ascension of Jesus, to take his place at the right of the Father, is historically honoured in the lectionary on Thursday, which is actually 40 days after the resurrection. I will follow the traditional lectionary readings for this Sunday, which is not Ascension Day, and reference the ascension as context.

Common Theme. The ascension is not the end of the story for the people of God. Through the Messiah, God has created a new community of Jews and Gentiles that will belong to God and reveal God to the world. This task is not something we do alone; we do it together and with the gift of the Helper, the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit empowers and emboldens us to continue the redemptive mission of the Messiah through the body of Messiah.

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26. Peter stands up and takes the lead among the disciples, numbering around 120. This conclave of disciples would include both males and females, friends such as Lazarus, and family such as Mary and the brothers of Jesus. In Luke 5 (same author as Acts), Jesus says to Peter that he will catch men. However, the majority of Acts is actually about Paul. We hear very little of the exploits of Peter. There is an apocryphal work called *Acts of Peter*, written by Leucius Charinus, a companion of John the apostle, who records the exploits of Peter. This work gives us the tradition that Peter was crucified upside down.

Matthias was chosen as a replacement for Judas via lot. The calling of Matthias is unique in that he was not chosen directly by Jesus, and he was appointed before the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost, thus the casting of lots. This is not how most of us choose our shepherds anymore. Now we prefer them to have attended Bible colleges.

Psalm 1. The opening verse of Psalm 1, “Blessed is the man,” sets the tone for the entire Book of Psalms. The Hebrew word translated “blessed” is more literally translated as “happy” and is in the plural form; that is, there are multiple contentments or “happineses” that await us. To begin with, our happiness results from the careful choice of community, friends and peer group influences. Choosing bad or wicked friends will often diminish our witness for the Messiah and likely lead us astray from God. Blessing and happiness are also found in the daily study and application of the Word of God. The last verse reminds us that faith is an action, for God knows “the way of the righteous.” Not only does he know the heart of the believer, but also the path that the believer walks. We do not walk alone; we walk as part of a community, so we should choose our communities wisely.

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1 John 5:9-13. John uses a Jewish rhetorical device called *kal v' homer*, from the lighter to the heavier, often signalled in the teachings of Jesus by the phrase “how much more.” If we receive human witness as valid—and we all do in some form every day, otherwise we would never believe anything that anyone ever says—then how much more valid should the witness of God be? God is truth, and we can have confidence that what God has witnessed to us about Jesus is also true and that he has given us eternal life. When we think of the term “eternal life,” we often relegate that to the afterlife. That is, we will get eternal life when we die. In Jewish thought, the afterlife is termed *olam haba*, “the world to come.” Eternal life is something different; it is not life in the world to come. Instead, eternal life is a life lived in relationship with the eternal and living God. That is something that is lived out right now, something that is present and continuous. The relationship with the risen and ascended Lord will also continue into the world to come.

John 17:6-19. In the prayer of Jesus to his Father, he says that his disciples have “kept your word.” This resonates with Psalm 1. The disciples have studied, meditated, and applied the teachings of Jesus. They haven’t always accomplished this perfectly. Nor have they always fully understood the mission. However, they have not sat in the counsel of the wicked. Instead, they have sat at the feet of Jesus. Jesus had previously sent them out two by two, and then they did preach the Kingdom, heal the sick, and cast out demons. Jesus knows he is going to leave them soon and that he is “coming to the Father.” This will prove to be a very testing time for the disciples. Lovingly, Jesus does not want his disciples, or us, to be alone. And so he prays for the protection of the Father, particularly protection against the evil one! This request is also included in the Lord’s Prayer, “Deliver us from the Evil One.” Jesus is not leaving us in the world, rather he is sending us into the world. The world is not something God wants to abandon, as it is written, “For God so loved the world.” Sometimes in the midst of hardships that we endure, we would desire from the Lord to be “taken out of the world.” This is not the request of Jesus. Our role is not to withdraw from the world, though we may be tempted to do so in a culture increasingly hostile to the faith. As disciples of Jesus, we are sent into the world, part of a growing community of believers seeking the relationship of unity that Jesus shares with the Father. We continue the redemptive work of the Messiah, not alone, but with God, the Spirit, and each other.

ACNA Addendum

Psalm 68. Psalm 68 is traditionally part of the prayers for *Shavuot* (Pentecost) in Judaism. David begins the psalm with a triumphal declaration that when God goes forth he defeats his enemies. The resurrection has indeed defeated death; that knowledge should bring us gladness and rejoicing. Our response should be the same as David’s, who in verse 4 extols us to “Sing to God and praise His name.” Verse 5 notes that part of the redemption includes God protecting the widows and the orphans, which James 1:27 reminds us is true religion. David uses the imagery of jealous mountains fuming in envy at God dwelling with his people in Zion. Mount Zion is not a large imposing mountain. In actuality, Zion is the smallest of mountains in Jerusalem. God so often chooses the weak to confound the strong. God is

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actively involved in the life and victory of his people, even more so now following the resurrection and ascension of the Lord with the sending of the Holy Spirit amongst his people. We are now to be sent forth in the name of the Lord, empowered and emboldened to extend the redemption with life and hope to a broken world.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.