

# Coffee to Go|Ascension Sunday

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

vacancy, Jesus, mystery, ascension, heaven, image, God, spiritual, liturgical seasons

## SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Blake Smith

### **Karin Peter** 00:27

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the seasons, scriptures and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karen Peter, and I'm here with Blake Smith. And we welcome you to this episode on our journey. So this week we are in the last week of the Easter season and we're asking ourselves, what's Jesus doing this week? Where are we with Jesus this week? Well, this last week is called ascension Sunday. Now I just want to make a little clarification, Ascension Day is actually the Thursday before the last Sunday of Easter. And so, if we were to observe Ascension Day on that Thursday, we would then have the Seventh Sunday of Easter. This is all very boring, and it involves numbers I'm sorry, but in Community of Christ we and many other denominations, instead of observing Ascension Day on the Thursday before the last Sunday of the Easter season, we observe it on that last Sunday of the Easter season. So that's what we're doing today. We are observing Ascension as a Sunday, Ascension Sunday. And it's also called Ascension of the Lord in some traditions and some resources. If you read a lot about the Christian calendar, you'll see it listed as Ascension of the Lord. And this is the time and place in the Jesus story where Jesus is leaving the earth and ascending into heaven. However, you want to envision that. Now when I was growing up, it was on the front of the Sunday School bulletin, you just like saw Jesus's feet as he disappeared into a cloud up to heaven. And so for a lot of my life, that's how I imagined Ascension Sunday. Then I watched, you know, Star Trek episodes, and then I began to imagine it like that transporter would beam up, and that was my image of Ascension Sunday. So, to be honest, at this point in my life, I don't even have a physical image of Jesus ascending into heaven. I have more of a spiritual image for myself of what that looks like. But you do you however that works for you. However, you envision that it is the day where the scriptures talk about Jesus ascending into heaven. And there's a sense in this scripture that there's a spiritual vacancy that exists between the departure of Jesus and the fullness of that other Advocate or the Spirit, and its presence. There's this little vacant space in between Jesus leaves vacancy before the Spirit comes. And that's kind of what this scripture addresses. So, let's hear what the story says, Blake.

### **Blake Smith** 03:26

I'm reminded when you talk about the spiritual vacancy, I had a seminary professor who often talked about living in the in-between times, and if we think about it, this is actually the second in-between time in a very short amount of time for these disciples. I mean, there's the crucifixion, and then there's three days without and then okay, now Jesus is back. And oh, wait a minute. Now Jesus is going again. And what's next? So...

**Karin Peter** 03:53

It's that roller coaster?

**Blake Smith** 03:57

So the passage today is Luke chapter 24, the 44th through the 53rd verse. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, And He said to them, "thus it is written that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things, and see, I am sending upon you what my father promised. So, stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands. He blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried away up into heaven. And, and they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they were continually in the Temple blessing God. So, in this time of in-between and quite honestly, again, the second one in a very short amount of time, there's this great mystery. And particularly at this point, there's a mystery in the departure of Jesus. And we can't explain or understand what happened without resorting to the childlike concepts of a heaven "up there," where Jesus went to heaven and a literal place. I mean, that's, we do that with so much of Scripture, we have to put on it images that we know and understand. It's not too unlike the way Jesus taught the disciples, as you've mentioned, before, using images that were current in that time, and we use those kinds of things. The problem is, is that Western culture and practice almost demands an end to mystery, since the time of enlightenment, and, and post enlightenment and all of that, and reason, we want to find the answer. And we want to know that we have the truth. Dwelling in mystery is uncomfortable. Being in this in-between time is uncomfortable. So one of the things that came to mind as I was thinking about this passage, and our time together was that this idea of the mystery of God or God as mystery is something that is addressed in another one of our podcasts... Carla Long, who hosts with Tony and Charmaine, the Percolating on Faith series. There's a podcast. It's number 160, Self-Revealing God. I would encourage our listeners to go back and listen to that. They do a really nice job of kind of digging into that goddess mystery a little bit helping us understand why that's important and why it's difficult.

**Karin Peter** 06:55

I think that's part of the series that came out of Faith Seeking Understanding, wasn't that the Migliore book? Yeah, that's a, that's a great series. And we encourage you to go back and listen to that I have a hard time just living in that mystery, myself, always trying to figure it out and puzzle it out. So, when I think about this scripture, though, and thinking about what it would feel like, if I was one of those disciples, they're watching Jesus leave, and experiencing that kind of period of vacancy this week, let's live in in that spot. Let's live with a vacancy this week. And one way to do it is to remove something that you absolutely love looking at in your house, a favorite picture, or a favorite decorative item, or your favorite coffee cup that you use in the morning, remove it for the week. And that way, every time you go to either look at that picture or pick up that coffee cup, you're going to notice the vacancy, you'll notice that empty space and you can remind yourself, you are making room with that vacancy, for the Holy Spirit, for the Comforter, for Sophia, the female expression of the Holy Spirit as wisdom, you're making

space for that divine spiritual presence to come into your life more fully. So that's what I'm gonna do this week is I'm gonna live with a vacancy.

**Blake Smith** 08:27

All right, well, I think that's great. And I want to acknowledge and just name the elephant in the room, if you will, that some of us just aren't comfortable with the vacancy. And we need to know that that's okay. But, and the important thing I think here is to ask ourselves, "Why?" So, if we are asking ourselves the question, Am I okay, with a sense of mystery around Jesus, or do I need solid answers? Why is that? What from my life experience, in my background and my history and the ways that I've been taught, leads me to that way? And how might I open myself up to be able to live in that vacancy? Do I want a heaven to be "up there," and hell "down there" with everything delineated and final and very clear cut? Or, can I find joy in the mystery of God's presence and purposes? Can I be open to God being bigger than any particular image? And finally, is there a spiritual vacancy in my life? It's not just about living in the vacancy that is this time in the Christian calendar. But what might be that spiritual vacancy in my life today? And how do I sense the Spirit prompting me to open up to its companionship and advocacy on my behalf. So we have an Ascension Day blessing to finish us off today. And here it is... You are witnesses of abundant love. May you be gentle in power and strong in tenderness. May you kindled a passion for peace and strengthen your will for justice. May goodness be your footprints in the world. Amen.

**Karin Peter** 10:21

Amen.

**Blake Smith** 10:22

I love that be gentle and power and strong and tenderness, flipping things upside down just as Jesus did. Thanks again for joining us this week on Coffee to Go and we invite you to join us for the next episode of Coffee to Go as we continue on the journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.