

Ascension Day was last Thursday. However, on a limited basis, we can transfer readings forward or backward to fit the season. Ascension Day remembers Jesus going up to heaven *after* he walked around in his post-resurrection body. Also, Ascension Day is the last big feast day before Pentecost Sunday (May 31, 2020). On Pentecost, we celebrate the Spirit coming down from heaven; people wear red to church (or in the case of 2020 in their living room); and lectors practice reading Acts 2 in languages they haven't spoken since college. But today, Ascension models a "heaven and earth" practice that cultivates patience, but I will get to that later.

***Luke 24:49-53** 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 up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.*

Jesus goes up to heaven (also in [Acts 1:6-10](#)) and Spirit comes down ([Acts 2:1-3](#)). It's very easy to dismiss/ focus on the *teleportation* of Jesus in the Ascension story. Don't miss two important takeaways that you might miss because of the theatrics - 'God-ness' and mercy.

1st – God-ness Mark Tranvik of Augsburg college makes a good point about **Jesus' God-ness**

It can even be said that a new view of God is emerging in the Biblical texts describing the Ascension... These followers of Christ, all pious Jews, know that God alone is to be worshiped... It means it is no longer possible to talk about God without talking about Jesus.

I really like his point. Instead of making Jesus a disappearing, warm up act for the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Ascension highlights Jesus' deep heavenly connection with God. Jesus' *God-ness* gives the ancients permission to worship him. Jesus' transcendence over creation and intimate connection with God in heaven are on full display. (See 'deeper dive' for my understanding of transcendence.)

2nd - Mercy Tranvik also writes about forgiveness in relation to Ascension:

Lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). Jesus' departure to heaven is accompanied by a blessing of lifted hands... He has commissioned the first witnesses of his ascension and then he provides them with a remarkable message of forgiveness. Let us remember that these witnesses themselves were complicit in his execution. But the last image of their betrayed leader is a dramatic sign of mercy.

Nobody is too bad, too old, too sinful not to be embraced by mercy. Jesus forgave, commissioned, and trusted disciples with decidedly mixed performances as disciples. He trusted them with his

mission for the church. He put them...he puts us in a place of trust. Jesus trusted the disciple...Jesus trusts us. Jesus commissioned them...he commissions us to embody love and mercy.

Now personal - Impatience Ascension's commission is my leading, bleeding edge. I sometimes wear a collar in the car so that I am reminded not to unload on my fellow drivers. I store drafts of my emails for at least an hour because I don't want to communicate impatience with the random stuff people send me. When my kids don't rinse their dishes for the 70x7th time, I remember that I've only got around 4 years left with a full house.

Remembering that God is far more merciful to me than I am to my family, I am a touch more patient. When I look up and look around (transcendent and immanent) I can have a pointed patience. I have a reason to be patient more than just "good things come to those wait." I am done with patience for patience's sake. I practice patience because it is heavenly, and it is merciful. It creates a bigger field of view.

Where we place our attention is everything. Do I look for an expansive creation, a big God, and wide-open potential in people? Or do I see them as an obstacle to be overcome? When I look up to God, my immanent (see deeper dive) world gets bigger. When I look up to God, I see my family, church, and community far more than a collection of annoying and / or pleasing people. I still get annoyed at the dried cheese on the plate that my kids didn't rinse, but I don't let the plate be the only thing I see.

Deeper dive into Transcendence, Immanence, and the Cross

Transcendence You might think I have succumbed to a retrograde spirituality. Am I like a primitive believing in a transcendent god? Do I practice magic and ritual to please a wrathful deity? I would offer to you that heavenly prayer *is* a piece of a full faith. I think a life affirming spirituality has transcendence **and** immanence.

Immanence We might be tempted to think ourselves smarter than those superstitious ancients, because our God is "immanent" (all around us). We are not silly enough to believe in a white-haired God on a throne. We are glad that God is in our teacup and in a baby's smile. But immanence by itself is as lopsided as Zeus on a throne needing to be placated.

The Cross Think of the cross as a metaphor of both immanence and transcendence. The tall beam starts in the ground and points to heaven (transcendent). The cross' horizontal bar gathers the earth and embraces all creation is fully immersed in creation (immanent).

You can have functioning spirituality with one or zero of these practices. However, the cross embodies the Ascension (pointing to heaven) and the cross embodies the promise of

Pentecost (by reaching out to all people). We don't primitively cringe in fear of the heavens, nor do we think the universe is only a hug. We get to look to heaven while embracing the world.

This is a helpful way of framing transcendent and immanent spirituality. It's from an Adventist blogger named David Hamstra <http://apokalupto.blogspot.com/2018/02/four-adventisms.html>

