

EASTER: A TIME TO REJOICE

The Ascension of Our Lord

May 1, 2008

Acts 1:1-11

Psalm 47 or Psalm 93

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53

We Are Witnesses

The recorded accounts of Jesus' ascent into heaven give us one last look of his presence on earth, and we hear Jesus' final instructions to his beloved disciples. Jesus' parting words are filled with promise – “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, *NRSV*). Luke's account records Jesus assuring the disciples that he will send them what the Father has promised – that they will be “clothed with power from on high” (24:49, *NRSV*) – and that they will be “witnesses of these things” (24:48, *NRSV*).

To be called as a witness (Gk. *martys*) is to be called to testify to an event at which one is present. Three disciples – Peter, James, and John – were eyewitnesses to Jesus' Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13); now the eleven disciples are witnesses to Jesus' ascension and to his words of hope and promise. Stephen, the first Christian martyr and a witness (*martys*) for Christ, is described as being “full of grace and power” (Acts 6:8, *NRSV*). At his death by stoning, being “filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55, *NRSV*).

Today, 2000 years later, we, too, are “witnesses of these things” because we “are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29, *NRSV*). We, too, are “clothed with power from on high” and are called by Jesus to tell the Good News “that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47, *NRSV*).

The account of Jesus' ascension in the book of Acts concludes with a final and glorious promise – that Jesus will one day return (1:11). Jesus himself said that the Son of Man will come “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30, *NRSV*). A cloud, a sign of God's presence, overshadowed the disciples who witnessed Jesus' transfiguration; a cloud covered Mount Sinai when God appeared to Moses (Exodus 24:15-18), and a cloud took Jesus from the disciples' sight. But just as the disciples were admonished not to continue “gazing up toward heaven,” we are called to turn our gaze from the clouds toward wherever we are called to serve and to proclaim repentance and

forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name until that glorious day when Jesus returns. We are witnesses of these things!

This Reflection for Ascension Thursday was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This day we remember to pray: With thanksgiving for being called as witnesses for Jesus Christ to proclaim the Good News of repentance and forgiveness of sins. May God continue raising up witnesses so that the Good News is proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

Activity Corner: Shout It Out!

Supplies needed: Bibles; white or solid color paper cups; rice and/or beans (uncooked); crayons or markers; masking tape.

Using crayons or markers, decorate two paper cups. Fill one cup with rice and/or beans (about ¼ full) and tape the second cup on top to make a shaker. Ask one member of your household to read Psalm 47. During the reading, invite everyone else to clap their hands (see verse 1). At the end of the reading, ask everyone to shout out together "GOD HAS GONE UP WITH A SHOUT" and shake their filled paper cups.