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“May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened” (Ephesians 1:18).

The Ascension of the Lord

Acts 1:1-11; Ps 47; Eph 1:17-23; Mark 16:15-20

The departure of Jesus from this world marks the transfer of his redemptive mission to the disciples. Luke’s narrative account in Acts emphasizes this transfer when the two heavenly messengers ask the disciples why they stand staring up at the sky. They are to return to Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit, who will empower them to take Jesus’ message to the ends of the earth. The scene is influenced by Psalm 110, the exaltation of the Christ seated at the right hand of God in triumph. The Ascension also recalls the departure of Elijah in 2 Kings 2:9-14, when his disciple Elisha asks for a double portion of his spirit and receives his mantle when the prophet is taken up. Like most biblical stories, the theological import transcends historical details. A transfer of authority is occurring.

Another extrabiblical source offers its own unique view. In *God’s Images*, author James Dickey adds another striking allusion to the Ascension in a short poem accompanying the book’s powerful illustrations by artist Marvin Hayes. Hayes depicts Jesus rising above the disciples, rope-like veins in his arm raised in blessing emphasizing his humanity. This matches Dickey’s text describing the pulse in the neck of a disciple Jesus touches as he departs. The disciple in turn holds Jesus’ ankle

to feel his pulse as he lifts away.

The imagery invokes a biblical story distant yet intimate to this moment as fulfillment with enormous implications for us. It is the birth of Esau and Jacob, when the younger brother is born holding his sibling's ankle (Gen 25:26). It is a foreshadowing of the taking of Esau's birthright as adults. Surprisingly, Jacob's ambition gains God's approval.

Jesus, our older brother and firstborn from the dead, allows this same transfer of his Sonship to pass from him to us. His human journey among us and return to God is precisely for this purpose, to share the divine life. We are united by blood in the Eucharist echoed in every pulse of our life with Jesus as disciples. Jacob, plotting and wrestling his way into the promise God offered through his Son, received the blessing as a gift, even as we do.

Jesus departs so we can take his place. We are the body of Christ in the world, filled with his Holy Spirit, empowered to do the works he performed, assured that whatever we ask for in his name will be granted. How prepared are we to receive the power we ask for when we say: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love."?

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