

Seeing With the Eyes of Our Heart

^{NRS} **Ephesians 1:15** I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,

¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Well, it's Ascension Sunday- aren't you excited? Do you all have big Ascension plans for later today? Big Ascension parties? Yeah, if you are like most of the Presby-Luther-dists around here, you may have no idea what Ascension Sunday is. And you need to know this is ok. In fact it's probably a good thing- a healthy thing. (I have colleagues who lament that the church doesn't talk about Ascension- like it is the WORST thing. I mean first we stopped celebrating Rogation day, the Sunday before Ascension, and now Acension- I mean what's next??? And I listen to all this thinking, "Yeah, THIS why the church is in such a tough spot these days- no Rogation and Ascension.") I actually think it might be a good thing we've forgotten about Ascension, because it gives us the chance, now, to pick it up again and hear it with fresh ears.

So just to get us all on the same page, Ascension Sunday is the day on which the church remembers when Jesus, after he was raised up, went away, or ascended, in the end to sit on the right hand of God.

In the Luke passage this morning we hear the basic story of the ascension. Like most stories in the Gospel it is pretty much focused on Jesus- it's about him. We hear that after he was raised Jesus all the disciples were sitting with him night and day trying to soak up every little bit of teaching they could get. The main piece of his teaching was that they were to be a sent people- that they were to go out and do good deeds and preach good news. And then when they get to Bethany while Jesus is blessing them Luke describes him as kind of floating up into the air going away from them. I always see this in my head like the stage version of Peter Pan- when the kids learn to fly and are kind of being pulled up slowly by those wires. I had a thought this week maybe one way to celebrate Ascension would be to all go to a department store and ride the escalators, kind of blessing the world as we slowly rise up. And it's kind of a silly thought- but wouldn't be interesting for Christians to celebrate something NOT inside a building for once- to actually celebrate something out in the world where Jesus tells us to go?

Of course that's actually the real kick in the text, isn't it? I mean where does Jesus tell them to go again? They're supposed to get out of Dodge and go do good things. But where do they go after he leaves them, though? Yeah, they high tail it right back to Jerusalem where they, and I quote, lock themselves behind closed doors out of fear. It's like they were all watching Monty Python and the Holy Grail- as soon as he's out of sight they're like, "Run away! Run away!" I always wonder about Christians who talk about how superior the church is to other faith traditions- I mean we don't even come off well in our own book. You'd think we'd want to be a bit more humble. But that's just me.

And anyway, the Luke passage is really mainly about Jesus- he is the subject here. He is the one teaching. He is the one sending. And he is the one kind of magically floating away into the air.

No, if we really want to talk about us- and what Ascension means for us- we have to go to Paul this morning. It's really in Paul's text where we start to hear how Ascension might be about us, too.

After he greets them and prays for them listen to what he says to them. Paul says he is wishing that they would have the wisdom that comes from having the eyes of their hearts enlightened to the hope God has in store for them. He wishes they would have *the eyes of their hearts enlightened*- or opened up to see. Isn't that an incredible phrase? *The eyes of our hearts*? He asks, in other words, that they might have the ability to see the world, to see themselves, in a new way- a radically different and new way. Rather than just seeing the world as it appears on the surface- he's wanting them to see underneath this to the mystery beneath- he invites us to see with the eyes of their heart.

And what's underneath? He actually spells it out. First off it's hope. It is the hope we have in the, as he puts it, inheritance among the saints. Inheritance among the saints means the hope that comes simply from being inherited into the family of God- of being God's children, of being God bearers. Our real hope, Paul says, our deep hope, isn't in winning the lottery, or in the market going back up (although both would be fine), or even in finding a great job- no our deepest hope is in seeing, in realizing we have been

enfolded, engrafted into the life of God, the family of God. So this hope- this is the first thing he wants them to see.

And Paul needs to talk about it, because even though we say things like “we’re children of God” over and over and over again- I don’t think really always see ourselves this way, do we?

Last week I was in Atlanta at a conference. Most nights I had dinner with my friends- there’s a group of us now from seminary that are starting to turn this into a tradition. But on Tuesday they were all doing other things, so I walked down to a nice place and sat down at the bar to eat dinner and watch the first half of the Lakers game. It was a pretty slow night. And the bartender was a pretty interesting character. She was kind of half watching the game and half giving me a hard time for wearing this pink shirt I had on. She apparently hadn’t heard that it takes a real man to pull off wearing pink. Well, trying to play along I thought I’d give her hard time about her tattoos. She had a couple of really odd tattoos. On her right arm in Grafitti style letters was the name Derek. And then on her left arm in very plain font was the word stupid.

“Interesting tattoos,” I said. “Kind of like Frankenstein. Rrr...bread, good, fire bad. Derek- stupid.” Her smile faded. Unfortunately I realized what a stupid thing this was to say just slightly *after* it came out of my mouth. I have gotten a little bit better at filtering- but this was not a good moment.

And she gave me a look- kind of half puzzled and half angry. She tersely explained to me that ‘Derek’ was the father of her son who took off when the child was a baby. *That* tattoo was her idea- she got it when things were good between them. ‘Stupid’ on the other hand, referred to her- not Derek. And this tattoo was *his* idea after she

accidentally scratched his car one night trying to get groceries into the backseat while holding on to the baby. He said he wanted her to remember what she had done.

“Oh my God,” I said immediately. “That’s awful.”

“Well,” she said kind of looking away. And this was the most tragic part to me. “I am pretty stupid sometimes.” And with that she went off to tend to some other, undoubtedly less socially inept patrons. I sat there feeling awful not only for what I said, but for this person who was literally tattooed, literally marked with this terrible word, this terrible name, a name that has nothing to do with who she really is.

Oh, we accept all kinds of names for ourselves, labels, and identifies for ourselves that have nothing to do with who we are when we really are seeing with the eyes of the heart. That poor girl wore around a false name for all to see. Most of us hide these names where they are harder to see, though- we carry them around locked up inside of us. Sometimes we received these names when we were very young, and we’ve never been able to entirely get rid of them. Sometimes these names were given to us in anger; other times we were given them on accident- an offhand word not even meant for us to hear. But we did.

And we’re so hungry to know who we are- to know who we are for real, that sometimes we’ll accept any name- just so that we have one. We’ll accept any description, any label, feeling something has to be better than nothing.

Paul’s words to the Ephesians, though, Paul’s word to us, is that this isn’t true- what’s important isn’t simply having *a* name, *an* identity- it’s seeing with the eyes of our heart underneath to know our true name. To see ourselves as just as much a part of

God's family as Christ himself. And that actually connects us to Paul's second point- about the power of this hope.

Now this next moment, this power of the hope, this is where Paul really starts to sing. This is where Paul starts to lift off the ground a little bit and really get us into seeing and hearing something new. So listen up.

He sings about how not only was Christ raised up- but he is also ascended into heaven even now. And the power here is that because we already have this hope of being enfolded into the heart of God as being part of the family of God- well everything God experiences- we do, too. So just as Christ was crucified- we were crucified. And just as he was raised- we were raised. And just as he was raised up, ascended- so, too, are we. Even now.

This is who we really are, says Paul. At this very moment we aren't merely these flawed, tired souls- we are also these luminous, beautiful saints, dwelling with Christ in the heavenly places all around us. And our world isn't merely this flawed and tired place either- but the very kingdom of God, where the lions are stretching out and the lambs are right beside them hitting the snooze button. Right now, Paul says- this is who we really are.

Do you believe this? Can you see it?

Most of us only see glimpses of this- but these glimpses, these moments are enough to feel the shock of life change us forever.

Rachel Remen is a physician with a remarkable gift- she has the ability not only to treat patients, but she is also able to kind of see underneath her work to the meaning underneath. She has written two amazing books in which she shares stories of her practice.

She remembers when she was just starting out, and she was trying to draw blood. She had been shown how to do this, and now she was just supposed to get out there and do it. But she was awful at it. And doctors at Columbia Medical School were not supposed to be awful at anything. She would miss the veins, sometimes she would go too deep. This simple task seemed beyond her and she was frustrated beyond belief.

One night when she was struggling with a patient, causing them an incredible amount of pain, she became so frustrated that tears nearly came to her eyes- something absolutely forbidden for the young, competent, physician. Seeing her struggle, an orderly, an unskilled, rough looking young man, came over and offered his help. She was desperate enough to take it. And quietly, patiently, he talked her through a better way- and sure enough, with his help, the needle found it's way.

"How do you know so much about needles?" she asked with a laugh. "Oh, I'm diabetic," the young man said.

Well, several months later, Rachel was working in the ER. It was crazy as usual. Not enough beds. People lying in the hallways- their suffering on display for all the world to see. She was called into a trauma room, a young man had overdosed. She worked with the rest of the team trying to bring him out of it- but it was no good. When it was over she just glanced up at the young man's face. Stunned, she saw it was the

same young kid that had helped her so many months ago. And it hit her like a ton of bricks- he wasn't diabetic. He was an addict.

But even in spite of this, even in spite of this enormous pain he was carrying around, this enormous pack of shame big enough for a whole people- when he saw that someone needed his help- he came forward. He stepped up. From this awful mess of his own life, he found a way lesson someone else's pain.

Just then another doctor sneered at Rachel. "Just another addict- tag 'em and bag 'em. Move on."

Drawing herself up and finding her voice, she stared the man down and said loudly and firmly. "This is not just another hot shot- this a man. He helped me. He...he was my friend."

In that moment. In that instant. She saw this man not in the way the world did- as just another drug addict, as a problem, as a thing to be processed and removed. She saw him with the eyes of her heart, eyes of her enlightened heart, a heart that could see Jesus cared enough about this kid not only to live and die for him, but to raise him to new life at the right hand of the father right by his side. And the others couldn't see this, maybe even though that young man himself wasn't able to see it- but she did. And it changed her.

This is what Christianity is- this is the essence. It's not a set of doctrines. It's not a set of rituals. It's not in coming to a building once a week. It is a way of seeing- seeing the world not on the surface, not the appearance- but seeing underneath, seeing with the eyes of the heart, seeing the world as it is, as a God breathed planet full of God breathed

creatures and full of God breathed people- where every single person you see, every single one- each of these is a God bearer, a God carrier. Christianity isn't about right thinking—it's about right seeing. And when you see like this, and when you are seen like this- it changes everything. Everything. **Amen.**