

"Timeless" Luke 24:44f Ascension Eve (Wednesday after Rogate) 2022

Near the end of the Gospel of Saint Luke, something a little odd happens. There is the appearance of Christ to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We can definitely pin down the time of that event to the Day of Easter.

After that, things get pretty vague. Luke writes, "As the disciples were talking about these things, Jesus stood among them." Now this seems to be the same day, but it does not definitely say so.

Then there is a series of events marked by the words, "Then He ..." Then He reminded them that all this happened just as He had told them beforehand, and to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. Was that the same day, or not? Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. That sounds like a very long conversation, or more likely a series of conversations. Then He led them out to Bethany, blessed them, and was carried up into heaven.

We definitely know that this last event was the Ascension, which took place forty days after Easter. We know this from the same writer, Luke, in Acts chapter one. Yet the end of Luke's Gospel almost sounds like all the events happened in one day, Easter.

Now, obviously Luke is not contradicting himself so forgetfully as to accidentally omit forty days. There is something else going on here.

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Luke seems to be making the point that the event of Easter has radically changed the whole creation. Time has become altered. We are now living in a new era. Eternity has already intruded into our lives in the person of the immortal Christ. The old order of things has been contradicted and reversed by the resurrected Lord.

Time is now much less important. We are not creatures fearfully trying to put off the inevitable death that our sins have earned. We are not compelled to frantically try to fill our limited lives with meaning. Instead we already have eternal life now. The last remnants of this old creation of decay and corruption will soon disappear. Only the new creation of deathless perfection will remain.

We are part of this timeless and deathless new creation. Through Baptism, through faith, we are connected to the death and resurrection of Christ. We share in His victory over the grave. We share His immortality.

In the midst of this altered reality, Christ does something else new. He ascends. This is not to be understood in an overly physical sense. Although He did truly rise up into the air, He did not do so in the manner of a rocket ship launching into the sky. He did not speed

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upward until He reached escape velocity and then soared off into space.

Instead, He was lifted up from the earth and then hidden from their sight by a cloud. Christ now fills all things. He is seated at the right hand of the Father in glory, but He is also everywhere in the universe. For this is the God-Man who is no longer limited by His self-imposed state of humiliation.

At the Ascension, He withdrew His visible presence from the earth. He no longer walked about with His disciples.

Yet He is visible for us, in the Sacrament. When we see the bread, we are seeing His Body. When we see the wine, we are seeing His Blood.

Still, He is hidden behind the visible elements. It is not the same as when Peter and John and the rest touched Him and spoke with Him face to face.

Yet He speaks today. He speaks right now. He speaks in His Word, in a hidden way, to be sure.

Christ is not really gone. He is with us to the very end of the age. He is particularly with us in the Gospel ministry. Although we yearn to be with Him face to face, that must wait until a later day.

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Yet it is inevitable. He will reveal Himself to us in due time. After the Ascension, He hides His visible presence from His Bride, the Church. Yet what bridegroom could hide himself forever? In the same way, Christ desires to reveal Himself to you, His beloved people. He eagerly awaits the day of unveiling, the day when the true reality will be revealed.

Then all the last remnants of sin will be removed. Your sinful flesh will be no more, and only what is righteous and holy will be in you. Death will be thrown into the lake of fire, never to threaten us again.

This is the promise of the Ascension of Christ. He has hidden Himself, but He will reappear.

Let us wait with patience, with repentance, as we eagerly receive the forgiveness of sins, which is our dear Savior's voice.

In His Name. Amen.