

Rising to New Heights of Forgiveness and Repentance*

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Feast of the Ascension Transferred

St. David's, Southfield

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May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen.

"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

Jesus is leaving them.

They've really only just gotten him back.

They have followed him, they were with him when he stood in his hometown synagogue and read from the prophet Isaiah,

*"The Spirit of the Lord God
has anointed me to bring good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners,
recovery of sight to the blind
to liberate the oppressed
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor—"*

When all who heard him were astonished by the authority in which he spoke.

They were there.

They were there when he healed the man with the unclean spirits,

There when he laid out his vision for the world—

*Blessed are those who are poor for the Kingdom of God is yours
Blessed are those who hunger for you shall be satisfied
Blessed are those who mourn for you shall laugh....*

There when he said, *"Stop judging and you will not be judged...forgive and you will be forgiven..."*

There when the unclean woman, the one who had been bleeding for 12 years, in hope and out of desperation touched his garment and was immediately healed and how he—never rebuked her—instead he praised her for her faith....

They were there and overwhelmed when he told the story of the ever-forgiving loving father who welcomed back his prodigal son, they saw then the depth of his care and compassion,

They had been there for almost all of it—his entry into Jerusalem—that didn't do at all what they had hoped—no uprising—no people's revolt against the Roman occupiers—only the beginning of the end—

They were there for that end—or what they thought was the end—at least the women stayed. The women watched him writhe in agony, forgive his captures, shout for help, filled with despair, the women who stayed saw him dead and told the story.

The same women back three days later found the tomb empty and the angels saying, "Why do you—look for the living among the dead? He is not here he is risen."

And now for the last 40 days, risen, alive, he has been with them, offering them a vision of hope and change beyond what their minds could have imagined. Now he is leaving them, returning to our Lord in Heaven.

What does Jesus say to them before he leaves? What instructions does he offer?

Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations beginning in Jerusalem.

This is Luke's Gospel. Jesus' parting directions to his followers, wait for the Holy Spirit it will soon be with you, go back to Jerusalem and wait there, but when the Holy Spirit has come to you and you do go out and start to tell this story, the point is to say, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins is for all."

What if we lived our lives, this afternoon, tomorrow morning, evening and the next day and the day after that—over and over again what if we lived our lives embodying Jesus' last words to his disciples in Luke's Gospel?

Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in my name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

What if we imparted with our words and our actions that our sins, my sins, your sins, all of our sins, individual, collective and systemic can, if there is repentance, can and will be—shall be forgiven.

What if we lived our lives, with our children, our spouse, our friends, colleagues and with strangers, what if everything about the way we interacted with people indicated to them and to us that their sins and our sins could indeed be forgiven?

Can you remember a time when someone forgave you? Can you remember a time when you screwed up:

Massively
Messed up
Fell short

Missed the mark
Sinned and someone forgave you?

Do you remember the sense of hope
Freedom?
How the Heaviness lifted?

What dear friends would our lives look like if we began to offer forgiveness as a first practice? A first response?

What would it look like if knowing that forgiveness was an option, if we began to own our mistakes and repent?

What would our communities, our congregations, our government be like if we began openly and regularly repenting of our screw-ups?

If we repented of our ignorance and insularity?
If we repented of our privilege?
What would happen if we repented of our blindness to the isms of our country's structures and the manner in which we may have benefitted?

What would happen if we lived our lives, ready to forgive?
Lived our lives in such a way that all whom we encountered would have a sense that from God and from us there is another chance to do things right?

How might our lives change? Our communities be altered?

Jesus asked his earliest followers to be ready to forgive and able to repent. May we, more than 2000 years later, lay down our excuses and do the very same. Amen.