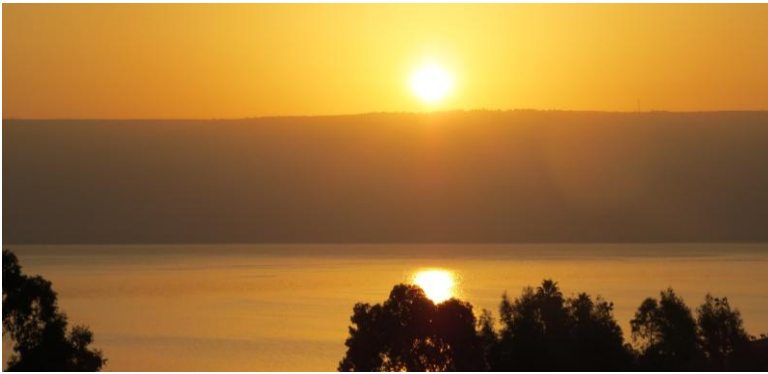


LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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THE ASCENSION

17th May 2026

Matt. 28:16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

All four Gospels have different ways of bringing the story to a close. The most stark is Mark, which originally ended with the enigmatic and impossible 16:8. Luke shows the disciples continuing to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem, where the Gospel began and where the Acts will begin. The final blessing takes place in Bethany in this Gospel. John's Gospel, has in effect, two endings, both highly significant: 20:30-31 and all of chapter 21. Today's passage is Matthew's closure of the Gospel story, a closure which is really an opening. The location, words and gestures are all unique to Matthew. The timing (Easter Sunday?) seems unclear.

Properly speaking, this final scene of the Gospel is a final summing up or résumé. It synthesises the identity of Jesus in this Gospel, in the light of the resurrection. It portrays the mission of the Church, especially baptism. It promises the continued presence-in-absence of the Risen Lord.

Thought for the day

We could ask how is the Risen Lord with us? The New Testament and the church tradition offer a rich array of "presences." Christ is present in the neighbour in need, in created reality beautiful and awe-inspiring, whenever the disciples gather, in the word proclaimed, in the sacrament celebrated and through the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we do not always feel this presence, but the words of Jesus are a guarantee that no matter what is going on in my life or my community or my church, he is with us, our Emmanuel.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

Matthew describes the departure of Jesus by delineating the bold outlines of what must guide the disciples forever, the characteristics that must mark the church in order to full fill his mission.

There are believers among the disciples and there are those who hesitate. The narrator is a realist. The disciples prostrate themselves. Doubtless they want to believe, but there are some who doubt and are undecided. Perhaps they are frightened and cannot grasp the meaning of it all. Matthew knows how weak the faith of the Christian communities is. If they could not trust Jesus, their faith would soon be extinguished.

Jesus draws near and comes into contact with them. He has the strength and the power they lack. If they trust in him they will not hesitate. Jesus promises his presence and his constant help. His followers will not be alone or forsaken, even if they are few, not even if they are two or three.

This is what the Christian community is designed to be. The power of the Risen One fills everything with his Spirit. Everything is directed to learning and teaching to live like Jesus, strengthened by him. He remains alive in his communities. He continues with us and among us, healing, forgiving, welcoming and thus humanizing life.

JOSE A PAGOLA - Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus

It is worth noting that Luke's is the only Gospel to give us the story of the Ascension of Our Lord and for him it is important because it prepares the way for Pentecost and the presence of Jesus in the church through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Matthew deals with this reality in a different way. At the beginning of his gospel the child to be born is named "Emmanuel", a name which means 'God is with us'. As the story of Jesus' life unfolded, the ways in which God is with us became increasingly clear through the activity of Jesus preaching the kingdom, healing, and bringing forgiveness. Now having been through the experience of his death and resurrection, Jesus announces their mission to his apostles and encourages them in it by telling them that he is with them always, until the end of time. The life of the church only makes sense if it is rooted in and driven forward by an awareness of that presence.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Jesus meets the disciples for the last time. His final words give them direction for their future. Perhaps you can recall such parting moments in your own life – leaving home, school, college, or the death of a loved one. Was there an occasion when the words spoken to you gave you direction for the future?
2. Perhaps you can identify with Jesus in the story, when as a parent, teacher, or in some other way you sent someone on his/her way in life, knowing that you would not be with him or her as in the past. When did the way you parted help the other to make his or her way in life?
3. Despite this extraordinary encounter with Jesus some of the disciples doubted. Dealing with questions and doubt is part of an adult faith journey. How have your questions and doubts helped to shape the faith you have today?
4. Jesus commissioned this collection of believing and doubting disciples to carry on his work. We inherit that mission today. How do you see yourself as commissioned to continue the mission of Jesus?
5. Jesus told his disciples that although he would not be physically with them, he would be with them in a new way right through life. Have there been times when you were reassured by the love and support of another even though s/he was not physically present with you? What are the things that help you to be aware of the presence of Jesus with you on life's journey?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

We can identify three main aspects in the story:

- At the end of his earthly life, and especially of his passion, Jesus makes his triumphant entry into heaven, to sit forever at the right hand of the Father.
- The time for forming his little community has come to an end, and Jesus sends his disciples out into the world.
- From now on Jesus and his followers must relate with each other differently.

All these aspects are present in the text. But do not look for them; just enter deeply into the story and you will discover for yourself how it presents the mystery of the Ascension.

Scripture Prayer

Lord, we sometimes have regrets for the Church of the past.

We feel like the eleven setting out for Galilee.

From time to time we meet that Church again and feel very happy, as they did when they were reunited with Jesus on the mountain.

But part of us quite rightly hesitates:

we know well that we cannot bring back the past,

that we must go in new directions,

discovering new disciples among the nations.

We need not be afraid:

Jesus promised that he will be with us always,

even when we come to the end of a time.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

We are the extension of this commissioning. God's kingdom is not limited to a particular place or set of people. Our communities are called to be alive not inside buildings but on the streets, constantly reaching out. Jesus' mission is all-encompassing, infinitely wide, infinitely open. His final message is a promise to us all: "I am with you always, to the end of the age." We might recall here the promise in Jesus' name *Emmanuel*, 'God with us'. The risen Jesus has not abandoned the world but is in this world, the divine presence in the community, and his followers are sent to carry this love to the world.

***"Christ opened the path to us. He is like a roped guide climbing a mountain who, on reaching the summit, pulls us up to him and leads us to God. If we entrust our life to him, if we let ourselves be guided by him, we are certain to be in safe hands."* (Pope Francis - General Audience 17.4.2013)**

'I am with you always until the end of the age...' Stay with this text this week. How does it make you feel? Where do you notice Christ present in the world around you?

How do you, as a disciple of the risen Lord, feel called to bring faith, hope and love to others?

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper