

May 21, 2023 Ascension Texts (adjusted)
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Acts 1:6-14, Ephesians 1:15-23,
Luke 24:44-53

Mihee Kim-Kort sermon on Psalm 47:1-9 and Luke 24:44-53: "Witnesses of Hope" on May 17, 2023 at the Festival of Homiletics, Minneapolis (this link may not be useable without a password: <https://app.hopin.com/events/festival-of-homiletics-2023/replay/TGI2ZXN0cmVhbVJlY29yZGluZzo4MTQ5NjY=>: Ashon Crawley: <https://ashoncrawley.com/> . Philadelphia Community Farm: <https://www.buttermilkcsa.com/>. San Lucas Toliman: <https://sanlucasmission.org/>. Minnesota Orchestra and others, Brea[d]th: <https://www.minnesotaorchestra.org/tickets/calendar/classical/breadth/>

Witnesses of All the Things

Hope and power, wisdom and revelation, to you Beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.

This is a full day here at hope: special guests, the last day of Sunday School and Sunday Forum, pizza, a congregational meeting and call vote, all the things.

This is a busy time all around: exams and graduations, commitments that pull us one way and the other, much we value, much to do, much to learn, God is at work.

The line in today's gospel that has been tumbling around in my mind and in my heart is this one:

"You are witnesses of *these things*."

Now Jesus has just reminded them AGAIN about *all these things*.

Remember how I healed her? Remember what I said? Remember what I did?

He's rehearsed for them how *these things* fulfill the hopes and dreams passed down for generations.

He's opened them to understand the scripture.

He's reminded them of his own suffering, his own dying, his own rising.

And then Jesus says so clearly: "You are witnesses of *these things*."

Witnesses of *all of these things*.

Over and over, through these last few episodes in the last chapter of Luke's gospel,

there are references to "*all the things*", all that's happened.

Can you imagine how they felt? So much to process, so much to take in.

The women don't find Jesus at the tomb, but instead the angelic messengers coax,

"Remember how he told you *this* would happen?"

Then Jesus finds the two disciples walking that road to Emmaus.

"Are you the only one," they ask, "who doesn't know *the things* that have taken place?"

Then he's at dinner and again, rehearsing "*all the things*."

Finally, it's time for him to be taken up into heaven, and again, he's reminding them of "*all the things*."

You are witnesses of *all these things*.

Dear ones, we are nearing the end of the Easter Season.

Next week we'll celebrate the Spirit's coming at Pentecost,
but today we celebrate the Ascension.

Many of you are familiar with that line in the middle of the Apostle's Creed?

"On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father."

At Ascension we remember how Jesus ascended to heaven (wherever exactly heaven is).

Sometimes the language used for the Ascension is that Jesus is enthroned with God, rules with God.

This language can be uncomfortable, but, when I'm honest:

at a time when there are *so many things*, when so much vies for power, for the ultimate seat,
there is something reassuring in knowing that Jesus has the seat, the power, already.

You are witnesses of these things, Jesus tells the disciples, *All the things*:

Witnesses of Jesus life: day by day, sharing meals, praying, sleeping, traveling with him.

Witnesses to his ministry: teaching and healing, loving and blessing, feeding and welcoming.

And as Pastor Mihee Kim-Kort reminded us at the Festival of Homiletics this week,

the disciples *are witnesses* of the suffering:
not only [the suffering] that Jesus experiences on the cross,
but the suffering around him, the suffering of the people Jesus encounters,
broken hearts, broken bodies, those who are barely named, marginalized and powerless.

"You are witnesses of these things," Jesus tells them.

And then he goes on: Stay here. Take a breath, and stay here.

When you are tempted to turn away, to dream of heaven, to hide your eyes, to run.

When you'd rather tune it out, let apathy overtake you,

stay here, "bear witness to the suffering, the dying, the rising, the repentance and the forgiveness."

Stay here until you are clothed with the power of the Spirit.

I am curious today what this Ascension means for us.

What does it mean to be witnesses to *all these things*? What does it mean to stay here?

Ashon Crawley is an artist, writer, poet, and professor at the University of Virginia.

He writes of what he calls Otherwise Possibilities, alternatives that disrupt marginalization and violence,
other ways of interacting and engaging.

Pastor Mihee Kim-Kort riffs on Ashon Crawley's idea: Otherwise Ferguson, Otherwise Gaza, Otherwise Detroit, Otherwise Buffalo, Otherwise Uvalde.
We might add, Otherwise Mosque Fires, Otherwise Immigration, Otherwise Gun Violence and Mass Shootings, Otherwise Ukraine, Otherwise Mental Health, Otherwise Minneapolis.
Otherwise Possibilities, Ashon Crawley calls them. Otherwise Possibilities.

Living as we are, in the midst of all the things of our time, I'm witnessing some Otherwise Possibilities.
Let me tell you about them:

I spent yesterday with 15 of you just across the St. Croix River, at Philadelphia Community Farm, in the beautiful hilly bluffs near Osceola, Wisconsin.

Part of our ACTION Project and racial justice learning with Minnesota Council of Churches, this was a field trip (no pun intended) and it was profound.

This BIPOC led farm is an intentional community, since 1989, working to decolonize how we interact with the land and water... and one another, honoring our bodies and one another's bodies, and differing abilities, making a space for learning and growing, vulnerability and change.

We were witnesses to all these things, so many intersections, witnesses to what the Holy Spirit was doing there and what she's doing in us, in our community.

This summer we've got a group doing a service learning trip to Guatemala.

The group includes Hope's Confirmation Class and people from First Congregational.

Some have asked, What will you do while you are in Guatemala?

Simply, we are going to be witnesses, not witnesses who come with the answers, but witnesses who listen and learn, and experience.

One of the things that is compelling for me about San Lucas Toliman Mission is that it is completely led by local Guatemalan people, they are making the decisions, creating the direction, inviting our participation, and our 10 person group: we go to learn, to witness what the Spirit is doing.

This week we mark the anniversary of George Floyd's murder.

I was captivated this weekend listening online to the collaborations of the Minnesota Orchestra and the Minnesota Chorale and others in the world premier of Brea[d]th.

It was honest and holy and so powerful.

This week my friends, be witnesses, to these things, to *all these things*, to the ways the community – our whole community – is hurting, and healing, and collectively dreaming about what comes next.

Beloved of God, servants of Christ, “We, too, are witnesses *of these things*” so many things...

May healing hold you. May grace find you.

And may the Spirit take you where you need to go today and always. Amen.