

May 24, 2020 | Ascension of the Lord (A)

[ACTS 1:1-11](#)

[PS 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9](#)

[EPH 1:17-23](#)

[MT 28:16-20](#)

By Thad Crouch

It strikes me in Acts that the apostles ask Jesus for the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel — after all they have seen and heard Jesus teach about the Reign of God. All the readings mention power. The Apostles' idea of God's power on earth is still stuck in the outdated failed idea that the messiah is an earthly king with an earthly army ready to restore justice and national sovereignty by a violent revolution against Rome.

Recall that when elders asked Samuel to appoint a king, God said the people “have rejected me as their King” and told Samuel to tell them an earthly king will claim rights over them, tax them, take the best of their harvests and livestock, and force people to work confiscated fields, make weapons and some to be soldiers. He said the people would become the king's slaves. (1 Samuel 8:1-17)

Jesus told Pilate his kingdom was not of this “world” (kosmos, cosmos). Cosmos can mean the physical “world” as in the earth or “universe” and it can mean “ordered system” or “worldly affairs.” [1](#) The Kingdom of God is not of the human “ordered system” of amassing and using national power through violence, domination, dehumanization, destruction, and death. God's kingdom is not of the culture of death, but the Gospel of Life; it is restorative justice, rehumanization, service, peace, and creative, nonviolent love, above all love.

What can the Ascension of the Lord mean for our own growth toward holiness, toward “thy will be done on earth as in heaven”, and for the mission of the Church?

How might we think and act if in our relationship to him, Jesus “ascends” from teacher, savior, to friend and Lord?

St. Paul categorizes power by principality, authority, and dominion. These describe both spiritual and earthly political powers. St. Paul uses the ancient Judaic messianic image of the ascended Lord seated at God's right hand and wrote Christ is “far above” all those powers.

If we relate to Christ as the Lord “far above” spiritual powers of angels and demons and far above political powers of political parties, legislatures, laws, law enforcement, mayors, governors, presidents, nations, and all political and economic ideologies of even nationalism itself, then we strive to teach and observe Christ's commandments as stated in the Gospel “far above” teaching and observing anything else. We evaluate political candidates by Christ's commandments to love one another — even enemies — above our party or national ideals.

When we relate to Christ as a loving Lord and friend who wants the best for all humanity, it transforms our “inordinate allegiances,” such that we prioritize God's will and

commandments. The more we realize this, the more we can be peacemakers as we make disciples, which means “learners,” of all nations, not just our own.

The outdated, limited idea of that earthly “messianic” military might for “national security” cannot protect us from abortion, racism, sexism, poverty, homelessness, assisted suicide, inadequate, inaccessible, unaffordable healthcare, housing shortages, political corruption, the erosion of human rights, climate change, and starvation. Rifles, fighter jets, and nuclear weapons do not provide effective strategies and supplies to secure us from pandemics.

Even when we look to militaries to protect us from dictators or occupying enemies, an empirical study of every conflict, both violent and nonviolent involving more than 1000 participants from 1900 to 2006 shows that organized civilian nonviolent campaigns are more likely to succeed than violence and more likely to result in stable democracy and peace. [\[2\]](#)

If you want peace, work peacefully not violently for justice.

The more we do that, the more we can replace “national security” *from* violent outside attackers to broader security both *from* violence and to security *for* the protection of life on every side of the cervix, the borders, the poverty lines, the racial lines, age brackets, and levels of physical abilities. Not because we trust in politics or economics, because Jesus has ascended to Lord in our relationship with him and “in God we trust.”

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[\[1\] Strong’s Concordance and HELPS Word-studies](#)

[\[2\] Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict](#)