

Seventh Sunday in Easter
May 17, 2026 • 10:30am
Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. Lex Breckinridge

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Well, today we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension. Tradition has it that 50 days after the resurrection, Jesus was drawn up into heaven, leaving final instructions for his disciples about what happens next.

Now, if you're counting, you may have already guessed that 50 days from Easter morning was actually last Thursday. But we do have the liberty to transfer feasts like this to the following Sunday, and so we have. Now, you may have seen depictions of the Ascension in a stained glass window, like this one right here.

The beautiful top third of this window is the Ascension. It's a beautiful picture, right? You just look at the disciples looking longingly towards Christ as he drifts upward. I mean, just look at each one of the faces of these disciples.

It's really beautiful. And you know, there's such humanity in their faces. And you can see a kind of a longing.

You can see a kind of a wonder. You know, if you look beneath the surface, you probably can see a little anxiety, because they're wondering what happens next. It's such an important event that the earliest Christians made it a centerpiece of the earliest creed that we have.

The Apostles' Creed. We say, on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of the Father.

The Ascension marks the end of Jesus' time on earth and the beginning of his role as the advocate for us human beings as we continue our earthly journeys. Gary Taylor preached a fine sermon last Sunday in which he explained the role of the advocate as one who stands alongside us, who travels the way with us, who supports us as we continue the work that Jesus began. Now that was particularly reassuring for these earliest Christians who were waiting for Jesus' return.

A return they thought was right around the corner. So they were living in liminal space. You know, threshold space.

That's what a liminal is. It's a threshold. They were living in in-between times.

Those times when one thing has happened and we're waiting for the next thing to happen. Now we seem to be living in in-between times right now, don't we? Economic anxiety, every will return. The as yet completely unknown capacity of artificial intelligence to reshape the workforce.

Indeed, to reshape our very lives. War and conflict that seem to have no end in sight. And you can add to the list.

And right here at home, Trinity is in an in-between time awaiting the calling of new clergy leadership. Waiting is hard work. If you find yourself wondering, like the disciples, is this the time when God will restore the kingdom of Israel? Well, who could blame you? It's a good question, isn't it? But Jesus has a little frustrating news for them and for us too.

It's not for you to know the time or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. I mean, we wait and wait and wait for justice to roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream as the prophet Amos promised. What's taking so long, Lord? What's taking so long? But neither the disciples or us are left stranded.

Jesus tells them, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the

ends of the earth. In this in-between world and in these in-between times, God has filled us with spiritual power and God has filled us with spiritual purpose.

We have jobs to do as God's kingdom comes. I mean, you remember the story of the feeding of the 5,000, don't you? A huge crowd has turned out to hear Jesus teach. And it's coming to the end of the day and Jesus looks at the crowd and we're told he has compassion for the crowd.

But they're hungry and restless and tired. And so the disciples turn to Jesus, you know, feeling slightly desperate, you can sense that, and they say, hey, these people are hungry and all we can feed them are five loaves and two fish. And Jesus gives them what must have been a long, hard look.

And he says, you give them something to eat. So the disciples get to work and everyone gets fed. And it turns out there is even an abundance left over, 12 baskets full.

Willing hands powered by the Holy Spirit get the job done. I was reminded of this last week at the Trinity Loaves and Fishes Gala. It was a celebration of the dedication of the Trinity community to feeding the hungry in New Orleans.

Over 64,000 meals were delivered last year by TLF. And while these hungry folks being fed is so important, it's just as important to celebrate the TLF community that makes it happen. The hands that chop the onions and brown the meat and put together the sandwiches.

Do it together in an environment of compassion and service and friendship. It's really a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven. Doing this sacred work, you let go of the anxious worry about how much it costs to fill your gas tank on the way to Molly's house to chop those onions.

It's the doing it together part that I want to talk to you about for a minute. Another name for that is community. For the last 200 years or so, we in the West have become increasingly individualistic and insular.

We're losing our sense of community. We're losing our sense of our responsibilities to our communities. And this was so insightfully addressed 25 years ago by the sociologist Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

Putnam pointed to a decline in American social capital. Those networks of relationships and trust that facilitate a society's functioning. That's all been going on since the 1950s.

And he uses the metaphor of fewer people joining bowling leagues. Of people, in fact, bowling alone. This disturbing trend has been juiced by rocket fuel in the years since by the rise of social media.

With its algorithms that identify our interests and then begin to feed us content that appears to conform to those interests. The result is that we receive an increasing diet of content that reinforces our prior understandings and commitments. And discounts any perspective which might be different from our own.

We're sorting ourselves into silos which are closed off from other human beings who might know a few things we don't. What a concept, right? Cleansing sunlight and refreshing oxygen have a hard time penetrating these hardened barriers we create. The rise of AI is only going to make this worse.

AI is already creating images and narratives in the hands of malicious content creators that falsely portray current events in a way that distorts reality. AI slop, it's called. And AI slop has become so sophisticated that it's getting more and more difficult to discern truth from this slop.

So here's a thought. Here's a thought. See this device right here? Everybody's got one, right? See this device right here? Put it down! And put it away! Yeah, I'm preaching to myself, okay? You know, use it for its original purpose.

This didn't start out as being a smartphone. It started out as being a dumb phone. Right? Use it to call another human being.

That's what it was originally for. Use it to call mama. Use it to call your spouse.

Use it to call your kids. I mean, quit doom scrolling. I mean, every time I spend more than 30 seconds looking at the news, I'm a lot less happier than I was before I opened my browser.

I mean, you know what I mean, don't you? So what's to be done? Let's get back to the Ascension. You know, the first disciples had hopes and longings and fears and anxieties just like we do. I mean, you can see it on their faces.

But Jesus didn't come to them as individuals. He gathered them as a community. He taught them as a community.

He departed from them in the midst of their little community. And he left them the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, to nurture, to sustain, and to grow their little community. You know, Jesus makes it crystal clear that it's the Spirit working in and through the community.

The Spirit that is the church. That's the community of the church that will spread the good news of the gospel to the world and bring in the kingdom of God. And what was true 2,000 years ago is still true today.

Listen to this very carefully. Truth will be discerned in a Spirit-filled community of faith. Communities like Trinity.

Not individually, in communities of faith. And those communities will spread the good news over all the earth, as that great hymn puts it. So that's why this community that gathers here at Trinity is so important.

You know, we're going to have a pretty hard time discerning truth by looking at our Instagram feeds. Or looking at our Twitter feeds. In fact, constant exposure to social media only increases our isolation.

It only increases our loneliness. It only increases our sense of detachment from other human beings. There's just not much truth to be found there.

On the other hand, when we gather here in this place, the place where we are together with others who are longing and seeking and hoping just like we are, that's when the Holy Spirit has room to break in. Together in a community of faithful seekers. That's where the spirit of truth is going to be found.

Not on our phone screens. Not on our laptops. In community.

Together. In small groups. In worships.

In work like Trinity Loaves and Fishes and Restorative Justice and Together New Orleans. That's where the spirit of truth shows up. And one last thing.

This vision of the Ascension right here. Take a moment after the conclusion of the sermon, just take a moment and meditate on that vision. This vision of the Ascension gives us hope.

You know, it's not so much a vision of Jesus leaving his friends and leaving us. It's really a vision of Jesus carrying his humanity and carrying our humanity back to God. Jesus is called the Son of Man throughout the Gospels.

You know what the Son of Man means? It means the human one. The human one. And so Jesus carries his humanity and he carries our humanity back to God.

Remember those two men dressed in white who say to the disciples that he will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven? That's such good news for us in these in-between times we're living in. As the world around us feels like it's

coming to pieces. As our uncertainties and anxieties sometimes feel just overwhelming.

In the midst of all the lying and deceit, the suffering and the violence, we have our work to do. We work for healing and reconciliation of relationships that are broken. We work for the healing of violence around us and the healing of the violence in our own broken hearts.

We work for justice and we offer acts of mercy. And in the midst of it all, we carry the vision of the Son of Man, the human one. The one who has made himself at home in our humanity.

The one who has carried all of our fears, all of our longings, all of our hopes and all of our joys back to God. We carry the promise that the human one is returning back home, returning back to us. To restore this broken world.

Amen.