



## St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

May 17, 2026; Ascension (transferred) [Acts 1:1-11](#) [Ephesians 1:15-23](#) [Luke 24:44-53](#)

Located just outside the walls of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives is a beautiful and sacred place, known well to Jesus and two millennia of pilgrims before and after his time. If you go to the Mount of Olives today, you will see some large churches. The Church of all Nations, the Pater Noster Church, and the Church of Mary Magdalene stand out as particularly beautiful. It would be easy to miss a small octagonal chapel with a dome, hidden inside a nearby mosque. This is the Chapel of the Ascension. Inside sits a stone with an indentation said the place Jesus placed his right foot as he launched himself to the heavens. Though a chapel has been on this site since the 4<sup>th</sup> century – and large churches have been built in more recent times -- this chapel's diminutive size and appearance shows how much that the Ascension has slipped from Christian consciousness. If you go to the Holy Land, you will find that the Church of the Holy Nativity (built over the spot where Jesus came down from heaven) and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (built on the site where Jesus died and rose again) are thronged with tourists. On the other hand, the chapel where Jesus ascended back to heaven – much like the Feast of the Ascension itself -- is practically ignored.

You would think that those who paid so much attention to the forty days leading up to Easter would celebrate the 40 days leading up to Easter would at least recognize what happened forty days after Easter was over. The Ascension wraps up the story Jesus' life, proclaiming that the baby born in the manger is actually the Cosmic Christ, the Lord, not just of our lives or of our world, but of the universe itself. With this in mind, you would think that Christians would see this feast as equal to, or even more important than, Christmas and Easter. Somehow, however, they don't.

Perhaps seeing an indentation on a rock as a footprint requires a little too much imagination for modern minds to take. Perhaps it's because we no longer believe in a three-tiered model of the universe, with heaven up there, hell down there, and us somehow in-between. Perhaps it's because even the most devoted of Christians struggle to equate Jesus with God. That is a topic we will hit two weeks from now on Trinity Sunday. On this Feast of the Ascension, the question is not about what we believe, but how we live our lives.

Traditional paintings of the Ascension often show the apostles standing with their arms raised toward the clouds, looking up at two bare feet that are about to disappear. While the gospel says that they were rejoicing, the apostles in these paintings seem rather panicked. They look like they want to reach up, grab those feet and pull Jesus back down. They don't want him to leave because they realize that after Jesus is gone, the ball is in their court. If Jesus is gone, people will have to experience Jesus through them. If people are going to experience the love of Jesus, it will be through their love. If people are going to experience the healing, forgiveness, the Good News and hope of Jesus, it will be through the healing, forgiveness, Good News, and hope they provide. Until this point Jesus' followers have been called disciples (those who learn). From now on, the followers of Jesus will be called apostles (those who are sent). The Ascension is their graduation from disciple school. Now it's time to get to work. The disciples' graduation did not mean they were done with church or with Jesus; it meant they were given the task of being the church, being Jesus, and bringing Jesus to everyone else. It means the same for you and for me. Like the apostles, we are being sent to proclaim Good News to a world that does not have any idea what we are talking about. Like the apostles, we don't have to do this on our own. Like the apostles, God will send the Holy Spirit to guide us and give us all we need to be and do what God is calling us to be and do. That is what happens next Sunday in the celebration of Pentecost. We have to come to grips with the Ascension first.

The 16th-century mystic named St Teresa of Avila put it this way:

*Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which He looks compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

The Ascension puts the ball in our court. What happens next is up to us.