

May 14, Ascension (Luke 24:44–53)

Too many of us have not had ears to hear. Our marketing materials have been too slick.

by [Amey Victoria Adkins-Jones](#) in the [May 2026](#) issue

Published on May 8, 2026

All Nations. I once was a worship leader at a church that used this phrase as a core part of its messaging: We were a church of all nations. It was a beautiful idea in a world where it did indeed still feel like Sunday mornings were the most segregated hours of the week. But no matter how many international flags hung around that sanctuary, the structure of the church leadership spoke the silent subtext out loud: All nations was a descriptor for the “mission field,” a hopeful nomenclature for the constituency of the congregation. But it was not a descriptor for who was called to comment, much less to lead. Here, only White American men (and perhaps a token man of color) were imagined as competent arbiters of God’s truth.

I felt this almost immediately, and as a then young person discerning ministry, knew that this would not be a place that would discern or support my call. And I grieved. Because the worship was beautiful, the resources plentiful, the graphics stunning, the sound professional, the potlucks amazing, the friendships overflowing. It was slick and glossy, with a budget to back it all up. It was also filled with relationships real and true. There was coffee and kids church and an intergenerational buzz every Sunday morning and, of course, enough bandwidth to sustain a built-in dating pool.

This loving family was constantly cited as the picture of heaven—though most of us considered the preaching to be “mid” at best. And the theology offered Gatorade more than it did the subtleties and nuance of a well-bodied wine. And while many people were uncomfortable with the silence around race and gender—to say nothing of sexuality—many of us continued to stay, mostly for one another.

Jesus’ words in Luke 24 stick with me, this proclamation that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to *all nations*.” We are more known for preaching damnation than forgiveness and perhaps not known for practicing forgiveness at all. At the time of this writing, the Trump administration has recently plunged the United States into war with Iran. Many now realize that theologies of White Christian nationalism have gone unchecked, either as ego-filled religious and racial delusion or as a convenient smoke screen to justify horrific acts of violence baptized in the waters of capitalism. And here it seems that *all nations* has ceased to reflect a beatific vision of equity, goodness, and justice. Instead, it has become a moniker of global submission and subservience. All nations, as long as a small ruling class is in charge. All nations, though only some can prosper, can have enough, can be kept safe.

I am again aware that all of this—the contemplation and penitence of Lent, the long walk to Calvary, and the glorious celebration of Easter—cannot simply reduce *all nations* to marketing language. And as much as I have loved a designed worship “experience,” I’ve become much more concerned with what we have when we strip it all away. Who do we say that God is? And if that God seems to have only our interests in mind, I wonder what *all nations* might have to say about us? Too many of us in the United States have not had ears to hear. Our marketing materials have been too slick.

So I'm thinking about comings and goings, about how Jesus freely crossed the perceived borders of humanity and did so in love. When did that incarnation love we preached so cozily turn into hate? As we have preached a God who chose to descend in love, do we preach a God who ascends just the same? When Jesus tells the disciples to wait to be clothed with power from high, I doubt he had in mind the chance to become a ruling class. When far too many are more concerned with inaugurating Armageddon than enacting ascension, what does it look like to read with and as all nations, rather than against all (other) nations? To read as if God so loved the world, and as if we too are not outside the vision of all nations turning their swords into ploughshares?

I know what it is to be in a place where leadership structures could not imagine my gifts, my call, my createdness by God. The preaching was poor, the theology weak. I know what it is to grieve in such wide gaps between word and deed and to see that the advice to "just leave" does not actually solve the problem. I also know that it is possible for a beloved community, however suppressed, to form and exist and to witness what else might be possible. I think we might find Jesus still among us, unrecognized (or made invisible), proclaiming to our hearts, "Peace be with you." As we are called this year to consider the Ascension amid ongoing destruction, it is Jesus' words that remind me that it is our call and our blessing to be able to say and to live, "And also with you."