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St Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th St. SW
Austin, MN, 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
sermon preached on-
May 12, 2013
Sunday after Ascension

Scripture Lessons: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:16-23

Hymns: 212; 213; 216; 221:1,2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 24:44-53

44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Risen and Ascended Lord, dear fellow
Redeemed

INTRO: (Church festival images)

With each of the different major festivals in the church year a very distinct image is likely to come to the Christian's mind. With Christmas almost everyone will see the image of a manger in a stable. With Lent we may recall the image of Jesus praying in Gethsemane, and with Good Friday we will remember the cross, and in our mind's eye we will see Jesus there, suffering for our sins. Easter brings the image of the empty tomb with the stone rolled away. Then comes Ascension Day, the festival we are observing this Sunday. The image that comes to my mind is Jesus with hands outstretched in blessing His disciples as He visibly ascended to heaven as our victorious Savior and King. This mental image of Jesus with His hands in the "blessing posture" is so very appropriate for our consideration of this special event in the life our Lord and His Church. May the Spirit direct us to a greater appreciation of these -

Theme: Ascension Blessings.

In leading up to his report of this event Luke sets the stage for us with Jesus' words to the disciples, reminding them that in Him -

I. The Scriptures Were Fulfilled.

Luke 24:44-45 "Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."

This is the first of the Ascension blessings which we should not neglect to appreciate. So often throughout the gospels the Holy Spirit would lead the Evangelists to cite the scriptures that were

being fulfilled in Jesus' life, beginning with His birth and childhood, and continuing through His ministry, and then His sufferings and death. Messianic Prophecies, starting with Moses' record, and found also in the psalms, especially the psalms of David, and then also in the words of the prophets, all found their fulfillment in Christ. So many of the details of the Savior's passion were revealed centuries before these things would come to pass. It was not by chance or coincidence. God in heaven knew all things, and directed the course of human events toward the fulfillment of all these things, in spite the forces of evil active within the hearts of men. All was completed just as the Scriptures had foretold, completed for our blessing, for our salvation!

So this perfect fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies coincides perfectly with the Lord's ascension, as His visible presence on earth comes to a close. So in observing the Ascension we are ready to join in the rejoicing of Psalm 47.

Psalm 47:5 God has gone up with a shout, The Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

We mark this event as such a great blessing because it brings us the certainty of Jesus being the Christ who was foretold by all the Scriptures. No one else in all history could fit the many prophecies of Holy Scripture. Despite many claiming to be the Messiah both before and after Jesus came into the world, Jesus, and only Jesus, fulfilled all that the Scriptures had presented regarding the promised Savior.

It was along with this that Jesus presented the disciples with a blessing only God can give, when **He opened their understanding so that they would comprehend the truth of the Scriptures.** So often during their years accompanying Jesus during His ministry, they just couldn't understand why He did what He did, or why He would talk about dying. That all seemed so negative, so defeatist. They didn't "get it" until the Lord opened their understanding. Then when they were enlightened, they rejoiced in the truth of their salvation.

This blessing is one that we also cherish. Many, at times, wonder why so many others in the world don't comprehend the truth that we know in our hearts even though they own Bibles and have read the Scriptures. The marvel is that we understand. We understand only because of the Spirit's blessing which comes to us through Christ's blessing. And so it is that we see Jesus in the Scriptures, and know and believe that Jesus came into the world to fulfill the promises of God for our salvation.

So it is that we are blessed to see in Jesus' Ascension that -

II. Our Salvation Has Been Secured.

The Son of God became incarnate for one reason, to save a sinful mankind from their fallen state. He came to free us from the curse of death, and enslavement to sin. Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, fulfilled the law's demand in every way. Jesus as our Brother bore our sin to the cross where He died in our place. But the grave could not hold Him. He rose from the dead, and lives forevermore. He has destroyed the power of sin and death. **“Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (I Corinthians 15:57)!

So then as we go forward to the Ascension of Jesus, we see an emissary from on High returning to Him who sent Him, returning with His mission accomplished. Jesus has accomplished all that God expected of Him, and, as a result **our salvation is secure!** It was **necessary** for Jesus to suffer and die. He alone could be that perfect sacrifice for sin, because He was pure and holy and free from every spot or blemish upon His soul. He alone could be that perfect sacrifice for sin because His blood was precious, the blood of the Son of God who came to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus was the sacrifice sufficient to bring the blessing of God's peace to the world. That was what God was doing in Christ, **“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them”** (2 Corinthians 5:19).

So it was that as Christ ascended to His native heaven, He did so with victory in hand, a victory that was a great blessing for each of us in our individual lives. So Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:7-8 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive,"

This is the news that needs to be heard around the world. So Jesus marked the opening of a new phase in God's plan for mankind's salvation **Repentance and remission of sins needs to be preached throughout the world.** It was to begin in Jerusalem, and was done so with miraculous results, but that was only the beginning! The Lord directed the disciples to take this message of salvation out to all the nations, to preach to everybody about the need for repentance and turning away from sin, and the good news of the remission of sins which Jesus secured for all people everywhere!

It is a wondrous blessing which the Lord has granted us that we also have received gifts from above and this glorious purpose in life that we should be His witnesses to the ends of the earth! The power of the Holy Spirit empowered the Apostles and gave them the remembrance of all things. Now the Spirit's power abides with that message as we faithfully proclaim the same message of repentance and remission of sins in Jesus' name.

Those who hear and believe then possess the wonder of -
III. Jesus' Ascension Blessing – A joyful Faith.

We are told of the joy that filled the disciple's hearts and worship in our text's account of Jesus' actual ascension.

Luke 24:50-53 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

While rising up into heaven Jesus imparted a final blessing, and great and wondrous spiritual blessing. He has been exalted above all things, and He fills all things with His presence. With His ascension He has fulfilled His promise to be with His

disciples always and everywhere, even to the end of the age! The disciples finally realized the wonder and the grace of Jesus' mission on this earth. This realization filled their hearts with joy. Now they truly understood that this Jesus was their Lord and their God, and they couldn't worship and praise God enough. It was their joy to gather together in Jesus' name and praise the God of their salvation.

May we also be so blessed! And so we are. For although we weren't standing on the Mount of Olives with the disciples as Jesus ascended into heaven, we have received His blessing. He is with us also until the end of the age. He has blessed us with freedom from sin and death. He has secured a place for us in heaven. We have His promise to return, a promise that was clearly affirmed by His visible ascension. Now we know the joy of life and salvation. As we come together to worship God we do not do so in fear and trembling because of our sins. We come together knowing the peace of God which passes all understanding, a peace secured for us by Jesus, our ascended Lord. We have the same hope and the same joy in common with the disciples. We are blessed by Jesus our victorious and exalted Lord.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.