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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
May 28, 2017  
Sunday after Ascension

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

Hymns: 212; 738; 221; 223:1,5 (344)

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

Sermon Text: Luke 24:44-53

“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.’<sup>45</sup> And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

<sup>46</sup>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,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> And you are witnesses of these things.<sup>49</sup> 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.’

<sup>50</sup>And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.<sup>51</sup> Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.<sup>52</sup> And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,<sup>53</sup> 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 Ascended Lord, dear fellow Redeemed:

**INTRO: The Joy of a Victorious Homecoming!**

We have seen it in pictures, we have seen it in news reports. It is deeper than the joy expressed when a sports team comes home with a championship. It is the joy of the returning soldier coming home safe and sound. It is the joy of the soldier coming home victorious to his homeland. It is knowing that the sacrifice made not only by him, but also or especially by those who made what is called the ultimate sacrifice was worth it. The people back home are safe from the enemies who were intent on their destruction. The joy on such an occasion is not only filling the hearts of the returning soldier, but also very much those who benefited from his service, and especially those who know that soldier as family. All that joy is about a temporal victory for a temporal life. This weekend our nations honors these veterans with our Memorial Day observances.

This morning in our worship we observe another homecoming, that of our Savior returning to His heavenly home. As we consider Jesus' ascension with all its implication of spiritual and eternal victory against evil foes determined to destroy us we should be filled with joy! When we recall that this Victor who returned to His home in heaven has called us His brothers and sisters; when we recall that the victory which He has won for us is greater and the benefit of that victory eternal, we realize this is cause for joy beyond expressing! And so it is today we once again mark this day of observance of Jesus' Ascension with joy! The Spirit would guide us in --

**THEME: Living the Joy of Jesus' Ascension.**

One of the blessings that came to the disciples during the forty days of Jesus' appearances between His resurrection and His ascension was --

### **I. The Joy of Truly Understanding the Scriptures.**

This was one of Jesus' primary points of instruction starting right away on Resurrection Day as Jesus walked with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. He spent that time with them opening their understanding to the Scriptures. Before Jesus' sufferings and death the disciples understanding was darkened by their own vision of

what they wanted the Messiah to be. That picture for the disciples, and indeed for the entire Jewish culture, did not include the Messiah suffering and dying. Quite the contrary, it was commonly held that when the Messiah would come He would not die. Time and again Jesus had taught the disciples that it was necessary for the Son of Man to go up Jerusalem and there suffer at the hands of His enemies and be crucified, and the third day rise again. Time and again the gospels report that the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. So after all their mistaken notions about Jesus had been shattered by His death and resurrection, Jesus taught them once again how and why all these things had to be.

**Luke 24:44-47** “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.’<sup>45</sup> And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

<sup>46</sup>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,

All of the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to Christ. All the Lord did with the Children of Israel was in preparation for the coming of the Seed of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. So the Law of Moses (those first five books of the Bible) and the record of the prophets (the historical account of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as well as the writings of the prophets) all directed people to the Christ who was to come. Many of the psalms contain detailed Messianic prophecies within them. Indeed, without knowing Christ one cannot find the true message of these Scriptures. One would be like the Ethiopian questioning Philip, “*I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?*” (Acts 8:34)

It is Jesus that opened the understanding of the disciples so that they could finally comprehend the Scriptures, and see in them the wonder of God's grace in Christ, our crucified and risen Savior.

And so it remains to this day. If one does not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, one cannot make sense of the Old Testament Scriptures. One must have the guidance that only comes through

Jesus and the Spirit whom He has sent. With Jesus we comprehend the Scriptures. Then we see Christ in the prophecies and marvel at how all things were fulfilled so perfectly. It was written over so many centuries all before Jesus was born, and that was how it all had to happen according to God's gracious providence for our soul's salvation. This is the blessing that comes to us yet today because Jesus spent that forty days making these appearances, showing Himself alive, and confirming the faith of the apostles that it might be passed on around the world and down through the centuries to us here in Austin, Minnesota some 2000 years later.

Jesus is the source of --

## **II. The Joy of the Message of Repentance and Forgiveness.**

The one flows from the other. Once one sees Jesus at the heart of all the Scriptures, and how all things took place just as the Lord declared through the prophets, then the message becomes the next "must." This message must go forth because it is vital to life. So Jesus taught the apostles as He prepared them for their mission:

**Luke 24:48-49** "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> And you are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> 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."

First consider the power of the message itself. It is a message of repentance. Repentance is the changing of someone's mind, changing one's way of thinking, one's basic philosophy of life. So it involves something far more than simply feeling sorry for doing something wrong. True repentance includes the realization that it is not the efforts of man that make things right with God. Our good deeds do **not** deliver the forgiveness of sins. Repentance in connection with Jesus directs the sinner to the cross of Christ for the remission of sins. It directs the sinner to the open tomb for the assurance of justification. Repentance connected to Jesus Christ points us up to heaven where Christ is at the right hand of God where He makes intercession for us so that we have peace with God through Jesus' merits.

This is the message that the world needs. The world needed it then, and it needs it now, and it will remain THE important message to be broadcast in this world until the day Christ returns. However, it was important for the Apostles to realize that this mission was not to be carried out with their strength. It would have success only with the power of the Holy Spirit, who would be poured out upon the Church not many days later in Jerusalem.

All this ground work was laid in preparation for Jesus' triumphant return to heaven. With their faith secure they would then respond with --

### **III. The Joy-filled Worship of Our Victorious Savior.**

The climax of our text reports the facts surrounding that glorious event.

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

They were near Jerusalem when Jesus' time came for His return to heaven. He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifted up those nail pierced, but now glorified hands in blessing. As He imparted a blessing upon this gathering of disciples, He rose up as Luke reported in Acts. They saw Jesus depart this earth, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. It was made clear that Jesus' visible presence would no longer be a part of the believers experience with the Lord.

Something greater has taken its place. Jesus returned to His heavenly home where the Father exalted Jesus, also according to His human nature far above all powers and might and dominion! All things were placed under Jesus' control for the good of His Church. We confess that Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. This image is not to be taken in a physical sense but rather a spiritual sense. God the Father has placed Jesus in the power position. He was granted that power that ultimate control

because He was the One who came down to earth to pay the ransom price and deliver us from sin and death. He paid the price with His own blood. He redeemed us body and soul so that we are the Lord's. He cared for us enough to suffer and die for us, and Jesus continues to care for us, and watch out for us in all our ways. He possesses the power and the might and the dominion to direct all things for our eternal salvation.

Jesus is our triumphant Lord! Having finally comprehended the grace of God in Christ Jesus and the salvation that was theirs in Jesus their ascended Lord, the Apostles hearts were filled with joy as they worshiped Him. And that is the joy that is ours today. Jesus fulfilled all the Father committed to Him, and so Jesus returned to the glory that was His as the Son of God from before the foundation of the world. God has exalted Him. God has made the name of Jesus above all names on earth or in heaven. Jesus is our Savior. Jesus is our God. Let us worship Him with joy in our hearts and sing our "Alleluias!" as we wait and watch for His glorious reappearing when we too shall ascend to that glory of heaven.

**AMEN.**

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans15:13)