

# INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
May 16, 2021  
Sunday after Ascension

Scripture Lessons: Ephesians 1:16-23, Luke 24:44-53

Hymns: 212:1, 5-7; 213:1-4; 215; 223:1,5

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

Sermon Text: Acts 1:1-11

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup>until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, <sup>3</sup>to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

<sup>4</sup>And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," *He said*, "you have heard from Me; <sup>5</sup>for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." <sup>6</sup>Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

<sup>9</sup>Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, <sup>11</sup>who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This

*same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, Our crucified, Risen, and ascended Lord, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Ascension Day -- It's not like Christmas!

We would never have Christmas come and go and not even realize it was Christmas, would we? That can happen fairly easily with Ascension Day. If one mentions it to some people, one might expect that some would even say, “What’s that? But Christmas and Ascension Day do have this in common, they are very significant days in the life of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. They also have this in common, most people don’t really understand the true spiritual significance of either one. While they might say, “Oh, yeah,” when one reminds them that Christmas is Jesus’ birthday, if one speaks of Jesus ascending into the clouds and returning to heaven, they might not know what to make of that.

Without doubt Jesus’ ascension was a very significant day in Jesus’ life, but do we really understand it’s significance for us in our lives? As we consider the Spirit inspired record of the closing days and the visible ascension of Jesus into heaven, may we be brought to see how --

**THEME: Jesus’ Ascension Gives Direction to Our Lives.**

Jesus’ Ascension brings us the --

**I. Assurance of the Successful Fulfillment  
of His Mission of Salvation.**

Luke opens his account of Jesus’ ascension by placing it in its proper context. That context is Jesus’ life and ministry. In Luke’s gospel account he recounts by inspiration the life of Christ from His birth through His ministry and Jesus’ sufferings, death, and

resurrection. Luke speaks of these things as the *beginning* of the things that Jesus does. This was the work of redemption, and the coming of the kingdom of God. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared several times before the disciples and many other believers, meeting with them, eating with them, teaching them. They saw Jesus and they touched Jesus, and they were convinced beyond any doubt that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead.

It was important that this truth be impressed upon them. It would be with this truth of a crucified and risen Savior that the apostles, as well as the rest of the believers, would go forward in life, and do those things which Jesus had called them to do.

Certainty of the truth of Jesus Christ is essential to living one's faith. Over the course of forty days from Jesus' resurrection to Jesus' ascension Jesus had several meetings with the apostles and many other believers. He used those meetings to speak to them about the kingdom of God. And so "*He ... presented Himself alive ... by many infallible proofs.*" (v. 3)

One can see how that would be important for the apostles, but what about us? It is indeed important for us also. Knowing Jesus fulfilled all that the Father had sent Him into the world to accomplish before He returned to heaven gives us confidence of faith. We have a complete salvation in Jesus. **Jesus gives a spiritual direction to our lives.** He brings us an understanding of the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God. Our faith in Jesus is not for this life only. It is our hope of eternal life with Him in heaven. This was Jesus' stated purpose and promise that He presented for our comfort and assurance on the night He was betrayed and taken captive by His enemies and entered His passion. He was going to prepare a place for us. To do that Jesus went to the cross and the grave, and then to His heavenly home. He went to prepare a place for us, assuring us that He would come again and receive us to Himself in heaven. (John 14:2-3)

This is the heavenly direction Jesus' ascension gives us based upon the certain knowledge that He died for us and rose again and lives forevermore! What was taken from us was only His visible, physical presence. What was given us was the assurance of His continuing presence wherever we might be, until He comes again.

Now we know that our spiritual lives are important, but being physical beings as well as spiritual being, living in a material world, we tend to focus on things going on in this world, on the things that seem to shape our daily lives. As we meditate upon Jesus' ascension the Spirit would direct our --

## II. Focus on Our Kingdom Calling.

Let's review Luke's account of what went on those days leading up to Jesus' ascension.

*“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; <sup>5</sup> for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” <sup>6</sup> Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:4-8)*

We know that after Jesus' resurrection the disciples had returned to Galilee, and they had seen the Lord on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. In our text Jesus is instructing them to remain in Jerusalem until the promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit, came upon them.

Pentecost was one of the high Jewish festivals which followed 50 days after Passover. The disciples would return to Jerusalem for Pentecost, and there they were to remain, waiting for that blessing which they didn't yet comprehend, the baptizing or washing of the Holy Spirit. But Jesus made it clear that this was all in preparation for the life's work that lay before them. They were to be His witnesses, sharing with Jews, and Samaritans, and the **world** the message of the gospel, the message of life and salvation in Jesus, our crucified and risen Savior.

Even during the forty days leading up to Jesus' ascension the apostles were still holding on to some misconceptions about the kingdom of God. They asked Jesus if He would now finally establish His kingdom on earth. We may not cling to the same images of what we would like to see for an earthly kingdom of Christ, but there are many who still do. We do get a lot of different images and misconceptions of Jesus' kingdom thrown at us by different spiritual teachers who are still looking for Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom based out of Jerusalem. They in turn apply political pressure to our government leaders in their attempt to bring about this earthly kingdom.

Jesus' points us in another direction. His answer to the apostles' question concerning the timing of the establishment of the political kingdom of God on earth, was basically; that is not your concern. That is our heavenly Father's business. He has His time in mind, and it will be revealed when it is time. Jesus was talking about the end of the world. Jesus then focused on the promise of the Father and Jesus Himself, to initiate the age of the Holy Spirit. again it was on that night that Jesus was betrayed that He had promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the apostles would receive a special outpouring of the Spirit that would prepare them for that calling of being Jesus' witnesses. They were to share the wonders of the gospel with their fellow Jews, but then also with the whole world. This blessing, this life purpose of spreading this message of salvation, has come to us.

While we do not share the same miraculous powers poured out on the Apostles, we do possess this assurance, the power of the Holy Spirit accompanies the message of the gospel. Jesus' promise to the apostles that they would be His witnesses is a promise that we also possess. We have been given this blessed privilege to share with others the hope that we hold in our hearts. It is the hope of everlasting life. It is the very keys of the kingdom that Jesus has entrusted to us! We may share the Lord's proclamation of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Jesus' name. Every time we share the reason for the hope within us, the Holy Spirit's power is present, working through the Word.

And then, there is that watchful looking up to the heavens --

### **III. Anticipating Jesus' Visible, Physical Return.**

Finally, we reach the climax of our text:

*“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, <sup>11</sup> who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)*

We read these verses and take it all for granted, we are that familiar with the fact that Jesus did indeed physically, visibly ascend into heaven. For the apostles witnessing this as it was happening, it had to be stunning! They had to be thinking, “What’s going on?” Yes, of course, Jesus had been preparing them for this event over the previous forty days, but we have no record of Jesus telling the apostles that they would see Him rise up off of the earth and be received into heaven. It had happened repeatedly that Jesus appeared, visited and taught some or all of the apostles, or other believers, and then Jesus would disappear, and then He would make another appearance later.

This was different, and intentionally so. In his gospel account of this event Luke reports that while Jesus was blessing the apostles, He was lifted up off of the earth until the cloud received Jesus out of their sight. This event was intended to convey the message that Jesus’ visible presence was being removed from the earth until the end of the age. That Jesus was blessing the apostles as He ascended conveys the message that this was a blessed event.

The stunned apostles stood there staring up into heaven. When I imagine the scene I see them with mouths hanging wide open, and they are just stuck in the moment! That is when those special angelic messengers drew them back down to earth, down to the tasks in this life that the Lord had given them to do. However, they went forward with the most blessed assurance! Jesus would return. Jesus would return just as they had seen Him go into heaven. It would be a return of His visible, physical presence. He would come as He had promised, to receive them to Himself.

How amazing is all this for us? I am afraid we are perhaps a bit matter of fact about all of it, -- ALL OF IT! We are a bit matter of fact about the marvel of Jesus' ascension and what it means for us. We are a bit matter of fact about the work Jesus has given us to do while His visible presence is not with us. (Do remember always that His **invisible** presence is with us to the very end of the age, and that is one of the blessings that comes to us in Jesus' ascension.)

Finally, we may be a bit matter of fact about the words of the angels, and the coming wonder of grace in Jesus' glorious return. This is something we should have on our minds everyday as we think about our days. We aren't to stand and stare in the sky looking for Jesus' return any more than the apostles were, but we should be anticipating His return, and eagerly. This is the biggest deal left in God's plan of salvation. It culminates with Jesus' glorious return with the purpose of receiving us to Himself.

He wants us to be busy while we wait and watch for His return. He wants us, **all of us**, to be active in gospel ministry. There are so many who need this gospel of God's love and forgiveness, starting right around us in our own communities, and then also across the globe, and the Lord has granted us the purpose-filled privilege of being partners in the gospel ministry. With our words, with our prayers, with our offerings, and yes even occasionally with a mission trip, we too can promote the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. And it is all hastening the Day as more and more of God's elect hear the gospel of Christ, and believe unto salvation.

As we see the Day approaching, keep an eye on the sky; one never knows, today could be that Day! Jesus promises, "*Surely, I am coming quickly.*" May we answer with John, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*" (Revelation 22:20)

**AMEN.**

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