

## Service – Sunday, May 21, 2023

### **Introduction: Acts 1:1-11 Ascension Sunday**

Today officially ends the Easter Season. On Thursday, the ascension of Jesus into Heaven was celebrated. The ascension is the last, individual, event of the earthly Ministry of Jesus. It is the completion of the resurrection. The ascension happened 40 days after the resurrection and 10 days before Pentecost. Today is also our final message in the “Through the eyes of Jesus” series that we’ve been following since Easter. In a nutshell, what we have been looking at through this series is how Jesus perceived the disciples in his last days with them here on earth. He knew he would not remain with his disciples, he knew that the Holy Spirit would be coming to take permanent residence in their hearts in 40 days, but until that time there were relationships to be reestablished (Peter), there was teaching to be taught (disciples/Emmaus), and there were final instructions to be given.

The account of the Ascension is recorded briefly at the very end of Luke’s gospel, and when he begins writing the Acts of the Apostles, he goes into more detail. Let’s review the text as we go along.

Acts 1:1-5 (NIV): In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with[b] the Holy Spirit.”

The number 40 has significance. 40 represents a time of testing and judgment. At the end of these times of testing and difficulty, there is relief and blessing. What is the significance of 40 days in biblical history? In the New Testament, Jesus was tempted for 40 days and 40 nights (Matthew 4:2). There were 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3). The number 40 specifically in the Bible has deep meaning, even to this day in many cultures and religions 40 days are those that you recommend to the woman to rest after giving birth.

Acts 1:6-7 (NIV): “So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

So now we come to the first thing that Jesus saw in his disciples.

### **1. Here Jesus saw... Disciples who were not focused.**

The disciples were eager to know things that Jesus didn’t want them to be thinking about. Their focus was not where it was supposed to be. They were looking for signs for Jesus’ return- For the End Times. Jesus had told them to be ready when He returned; but He never told them when He would come back. That is up to God the Father. Here the disciples are already looking for Christ’s return and he hasn’t even left yet. There is an impatience in them for the end to be written, to see the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God and the Reign of Christ. And yet as Jesus instructs, that is not for them, and it is not for us, to spend our days looking for the end of times. Personally, nearly 2,000 years from this message’s first uttering this message still needs to be learned by the Christian community. You may have been hearing in some Christian circles again the teaching of end times theology, pre and post

millennialism rumblings (will Believers be taken up into heaven before the 1,000 years of Tribulation/Satan's reign or after), and they're not new to our faith. In my opinion they distract from the reality of leaving things in God's hands and lead to a form of spiritual pride in prognosticating that almost moves towards a form of divination. I follow my father's leadership in this area...whenever he was asked if he was a pre or post millennialist he would say he was a nap millennialist...which usually led to a confused look and then he would say when people start talking about the end times, I take a nap. There are enough things that distract us from our first calling as committed Christians...our first calling to bring the message of Jesus Christ to every nation, every ethnic group of the world. In today's message Jesus has told them to wait for the Holy Spirit...he says "wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about....you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Instead the disciples are focused on end times theology and Jesus redirects them to His mission to the world.

8-9: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

## **2. Jesus saw... Disciples who were not focused and Disciples who had to wait.**

The Disciples were to wait for 10 days and then the Holy Spirit would come upon them. Jesus had explained to them that it was to their advantage when He left, because his leaving would mean that the Holy Spirit would come to them.

Waiting is not one of my spiritual gifts because it's closely related to patience. "Patience is a virtue possess it if you can, found seldom in a woman...never in a man". And among us here today, I'm probably the last person to be teaching this point in this church today. Sometimes waiting isn't a prelude to the main teaching or experience, almost always with God, waiting is the message itself. Waiting, perseverance, patience...waiting for the Lord's timing are a part of our growth in our holiness journey. I see waiting as a kind of paralysis, instead of the patience and trust that it is supposed to bring us in our walk with the Lord. But as I age I'm becoming a little better than I used to be.

I've often rushed in where Angels fear to tread only to have to backtrack and apologize in one way or another after the damage has been done. And yet what I have learned in those rare moments of my waiting is that often a better answer comes to mind after a bit. I know this in renovations and repairs around the house. There have been times when a problem has stumped me, when the only way ahead I can see is a difficult one. And I leave it for a day or so, and often a completely different solution to the problem comes to mind. I didn't think it through, follow a logical step by step form of reasoning, it just appeared in my mind and I said, "Oh!" .that might work.

In our journeys through life, problems appear, and unless there's fire or bleeding involved, it's good to just rest in uncertainty until a solution presents itself. In our text today Jesus tells his disciples to wait ten more days. It's important to trust that God has things in hand and that in His right time he will reveal His truth and His promise according to His plan. The disciples were ready to jump to the end of the world before even having received the Holy Spirit, but Jesus has a better plan for them, one that will lead to His hope being brought to many other souls in the world.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

## **3. Jesus saw... Disciples who had to say good-bye.**

After spending every day with Jesus for 3 years, it was time for Jesus to ascend into Heaven. This had to be difficult for the disciples. There are 3 things that happen when someone close leaves. When

someone that is close to us leaves, we share our emotions in the good-bye. We commit to keeping in touch. We make plans to see each other again.

All of these things happen when we move or when there is a death of a Christian. The truth is, this wasn't a good-bye; but an "until we meet again" promise.

This doctrine of Christ's ascension in the Creed is stated as the third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

The Ascension marks the exaltation of Jesus to His rightful place as God-sharing the heavenly throne with His Father. Why is this doctrine so critical to us?

Well, we note also in the text before us that the ascension of Jesus was visible and physical. In other words, it was such that it could be witnessed by people. This is significant. Just as it was important for Jesus to be seen following His resurrection, so it was necessary for Him to be seen as He ascended. As mentioned, this visible ascension brought to an end the earthly ministry of Christ. Had His appearances merely ceased, or had Jesus merely vanished without a trace-it would have been easy for the skeptics (then and now) to claim that the post-resurrection appearances (and consequently the resurrection itself) were mere fabrications. As it was, however, the unbelievers had yet another visible, tangible, physical event for which they could find no earthly explanation.

The words, "in the same way," imply that Jesus will return a second time in a manner similar to that in which He departed at the ascension. Specifically, Jesus will return in His glorified physical body in a way that is visible to all. His return will be literal and physical, just as His ascension was.

The ascension is important to our faith because it meant that Jesus was going Home. Home to His Father, Home to His Father's house! "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

His ascension means Jesus is serious about heaven as a place where you and I will feel at home. Heaven described by our Lord as a home. A place of Peace, without worry, with a permanence where our healing will take place, where we will finally be whole.

A place to be at home with God who's delighted to show us His glory, His home, His heaven. I remember the day we showed our sons our home on Queen Street. Their first experience seeing their rooms and backyard...there was thrill and excitement! Kids running all over the place, rolling on the floor, checking out the rooms, picking which ones they wanted, and I just enjoyed the moment! Can a human heart take that much excitement? But that is exactly what Jesus promised His ascension would bring.

Ascension Day of Christ tells us of God's power. It brings us hope to know we're not left with no meaning or no purpose. We'll enjoy an inheritance that'll be so rich and glorious.

There's an old saying that could help us understand what was taught to the disciples on Ascension day as they stood there looking upward towards heaven. "Two men look out through the same bars; one sees the mud, and one the stars."

Today the ascension helped the disciples see the stars. Let us see the stars too. We are in the world but not of this world (Jn.17:13-19). We are to set hearts on things above, rather than be trapped in a rut. Riveted by visions of Christ's glorious inheritance which He has won for us through the cross and the promise of Easter. Look up today with eyes of faith, know the hope to which he has called you. Set your sights above, especially when work, financial difficulties, relational breakdowns, burdens begin to demoralize, raise your eyes then! Look up! For Christ has ascended, blazing a trail to follow, choose to see the stars, not the mud! Get a right outlook today on life! Our destiny is not mud, but the ascended Christ and the Kingdom he goes to prepare for us. Celebrate the glorious inheritance we do have in our Lord!

## **Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

God of Majesty and Mystery, we praise you as Lord of all, maker of the deepest dimensions and delicate details of all that is. You live beyond time and hold all our days in your hands.  
You still come to us in Jesus as Lord of Mercy, to walk with us wherever we are in the world.  
You claim us as beloved children, blessed by the Spirit in his name.  
Receive our prayers and praise this day, and inspire us to live as witnesses to your grace and goodness here and everywhere, now and always.

**Lord Jesus Christ, you call us to carry the Good News of God's love and forgiveness to the ends of the earth.** Yet we often cannot find the words to tell others of our faith and hope.  
We fall silent when we could speak up.  
We try to act out your love, but we confess we usually act in our own best interests.  
Forgive us all the ways we fail to follow you.

## **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

God of the generations in time and eternity, we turn to you in these quiet moments to offer you our thanks and our hopes for our lives.  
This morning we give you thanks for all those people who have shown us your face and taught us to follow you through the loving example of their living faith.  
We are grateful for their wisdom and courage which continue to inspire us.  
Thank you for our life together in your church and the saints we've known here.  
May the light of Christ shine through our lives, too, so that we offer light for the world you love as witnesses to your purposes.

Christ of Compassion in action in you, we receive our call to live with purpose.  
From you, we learn how to love those around us. With you, we find strength to face each new day.  
So today we offer our prayers for those facing challenges these days and seek your guidance to respond to their cries.

We pray for those brought to mind by news headlines this week for situations of violence and deprivation, danger and devastation.....  
We pray for families going through difficult times, for all who are sick or in sorrow, for all who are lonely or despairing...  
We pray for those agonizing over important decisions and responsibilities, for those in leadership roles and for those who care for the most vulnerable...

### **Spirit of healing and hope,**

This Sunday, we pray for the work of healing and reconciliation in Canada, between indigenous people and those who have settled in this land.  
Heal lives limited by misunderstanding, and bring hope for just resolutions to problems of long-standing.  
Embrace those indigenous families who have lost someone in years past and honour their tears in gentleness.  
Increase in us all the spring of generosity we need to create communities of dignity and mutual respect  
Where ever we live on this land we call home.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, move with us into the week ahead, Remind us each day to live according to your will and purpose in all our relationships for we want to bear witness to the love we met in Jesus. We pray in His precious Name. Amen