

May 6, 2018
Sermon for Ascension (observed)
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Acts 1:1–11

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Acts 1:1–11 (ESV)

¹ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Dear Friends in Christ, dear lovers of God, dear Theophilus:
“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up” (v 1).

You liked my first book, O Theophilus? Here’s the sequel.
No question about it—Luke’s first book would have made the best-seller list. Now his readers wanted more.

Our text today is Acts 1:1–11, the opening verses of the second book written by Luke to a man called Theophilus. Luke’s first book, of course, is the Gospel that we know by his name.

In it, Luke described in detail the life of Jesus. Luke’s Book I ended with our Gospel reading, shortly after Jesus’ resurrection from the grave. And yet, as Luke himself writes, his first book records only what Jesus *began* to do and teach. Like all prudent best-selling authors, Luke was leaving his plot open for a sequel.

Luke’s Book Two is the Book of Acts, but, in a sense, his story continues far beyond his writing. If Book One is the story of what Jesus began, Book Two is the story of how he continued to act through us. If Book One is the story of the Gospel, Book Two is the story of what God’s people have done with the Gospel.

The Story of Jesus Continues with Us.
Now to understand that, Book One is an absolute requirement.

“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (vv 1–3).

Luke wants to be sure we see his two books as a unit. The Gospel of Luke gives a record of what Jesus began to do and teach—that is, the essential facts. Without the Gospel of Luke, Book Two would make no sense.

Without the Gospel, we wouldn’t know the characters in Acts—Jesus, Peter, and the rest. More important, without the Gospel, there could have been no Book Two. Book One, *Luke’s Gospel*, tells about *Jesus’ Gospel*.

In Luke, Jesus’ actions, especially His death and resurrection, have earned salvation for us. Jesus’ death means we have forgiveness of all sins. Jesus’ resurrection assures us of eternal life. Jesus’ teachings in Luke explain the truths of the kingdom of God, that by grace God rules in the hearts of all who believe, that God actually makes us kings. In Book Two, Luke assumes we know and believe this: *“He presented himself alive to [the apostles] after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (v 3).*

This Gospel of Jesus, reported in Luke’s Gospel, is required reading in order to move on to the book of Acts.

Without Jesus’ teachings, there would be no Word to proclaim. Without Jesus’ suffering and death, there’d be no reason to speak.

Without Jesus' resurrection, there'd be no hope; the story would be over. On the other hand, without Book Two, the meaning of Book One may have been forgotten. The Gospel is not a volume of ancient history that can just sit on a shelf. It's not simply a good book with which we can curl up in the living room. We can't just sit back and let someone read it to us. We haven't finished when we we've read and believed the Book of Luke. In Luke part Two, the Book of Acts, the story of Jesus' works and teachings continues—and it continues through us! The ascension ends Jesus' earthly ministry, yet our ministry is anything but an ending.

The story of Jesus' resurrection continues in Book II: "*He presented himself alive to [the apostles] after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days.*" For forty days, Jesus appeared to His disciples. He proved that Easter wasn't just one chapter in an ancient history book. For the disciples, "Jesus is alive!" was their motivation, their validation. For us, Easter continues to be just as real. Jesus *is* alive—and that's our hope, our proof. Jesus would soon leave the disciples—visibly—but he'd make sure that His work would continue. "*And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'*" (vv 4–5).

You know what He meant: chapter 2 of Acts tells of the day of Pentecost. The disciples would be filled with Holy Spirit.

They'd be given power to proclaim Jesus—everything He did and taught in Book I—boldly and in a whole bunch of languages.

Where the Holy Spirit is at work, Jesus' story continues.

The same story continues with us. We've been baptized with the Holy Spirit too—in the same act of Baptism with water and the Word, many of us as infants.

Baptism is not an isolated event in our personal ancient histories—or in our scrapbooks or photo albums. Our Baptisms mark the beginning of our lives in Christ. The Holy Spirit is living in us, keeping us in faith in Christ, continually sharing with us forgiveness, enabling us to do good works.

And by the Holy Spirit's power, we continue Jesus' work and teachings as we proclaim his Gospel to the world. Again our Text: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

You see that? Our text, the ascension, is the ending of Jesus' earthly ministry, but it's not an ending at all. It reads more like a table of contents for Book II.

Book II is the story of the Gospel being spread, and it's going to spread just as Jesus says: the Book of Acts *will* tell us first about the Gospel going out first to Jerusalem, then we'll read about it going out beyond to Samaria, and by the end of Acts it'll reach to what in the first century would seem the ends of the earth.

The disciples will continue Jesus' story by being his witnesses—the Book of Acts is a book of acts—and, yes, they'll take the word of Christ almost to the ends of the known world.

But the known world has grown since then. The end of the earth is farther than it used to be. And we are commanded to continue Jesus' story.

Book II continues with us! We are now the characters in Book II, the Book of Acts. We have our new Jerusalems and Judeas and Samarias as well.

They're our children, the folks we work with, the people we see at the cattle auction, at the football stadium, at the grocery store. There are *hundreds* of unchurched souls in our town, millions in our state, 150 million in the United States, four billion in the world.

That's a tall order, but Jesus continues to be with us all through Book II. *"And when [Jesus] had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight"* (v 9).

The disciples saw Jesus leave, but He was really going away in order to be with them. At the ascension, Jesus took His seat at the right hand of God's power, but that's not a distant place at all. Jesus is constantly exercising God's power on our behalf. It means He's now everywhere, always with us—not just His divine nature, but His human nature too. Jesus—true God *and* true man. He is right here with us. But since He's at the right hand of God's power, exercising God's power, He's also guiding us and protecting us.

Book II has continued far beyond the completion of Luke's second writing. In fact, Book II will continue until the end of time.

But it's interesting, the Greek forms Luke uses in v 1 of our text might suggest a third book.

We don't have a third book of Luke, but we might imagine a Book III that will complete the story of Jesus forever. "*And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'*" (vv 10–11).

If there were to be a Book III, it would begin when this same Jesus returns as we have seen Him go. Christ has ascended into heaven as our forerunner, with the promise to return and take us there.

But that's another story; which will indeed be fulfilled when Christ comes again in glory. That Book III of Christ will never end as it goes into eternity.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Sermon Outline

The Story of Jesus Continues with Us

Acts 1:1–11

- I. Book I is an absolute prerequisite to begin the story of Jesus.
- II. Book II continues the story of Jesus' works and teachings.
- III. Book III will complete the story of Jesus forever.