

May 17, 2015
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 from the one who touches our lives, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Where is your focus?

When going through life, do you just focus on the immediate things in front of you, the day-to-day, the short-term impact of what you do?

Or do you consider the aftereffects of your actions, the bigger picture, the long term?

Too often, we get bogged down in the immediate tasks in front of us and don't consider or even see the bigger picture.

It's been this way since the beginning.

Adam and Eve were focused on the immediate desire of having the wisdom of God. They saw that the fruit looked good and pleasurable to eat right then, and they lost sight of the long-term relationship with God that it would cost.

They lost sight of heaven itself.

We, the Church, the young Bride of Christ, get so focused on the tasks that are before us—what we need to do and what's the most effective way to do it—that we often lose sight of the big picture, our own relationship with Christ.

Where is your focus?

Are you so absorbed with the tasks before you that you forget about the big picture?

Do you get so absorbed with the things of this world that you forget about heaven?

When that happens, how do you regain that heavenly focus?

Once you've lost the big picture, once you've lost the heavenly focus,

once you've lost heaven itself—how can it be restored?

Luke gives us the answer. 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.”* (vv 1–3).

Picture a newly married couple. The young bride, knows that her in-laws are coming to her house for the first time and she wants to make sure everything is just perfect. She is running around the house, so frantic in preparations for her in-laws' visit that things were starting to go wrong: she chipped a dish while putting it away, she lost her “To Do” list, she knocked over a vase while dusting and spilled water over the table and onto the floor. And as things were starting to fall apart, her groom came home. He walked over to his young bride. He put his hand on her shoulder to slow her down. He gave her a hug and said, “I'm here. I'll take care of it. All this stuff isn't what's most important. You are. I'll take care of you.”

Jesus, the Groom, came for you, the Bride of Christ. He came to lift you up into heaven with Himself.

He came to give heaven back to you.

He did it by becoming alive after His suffering.

He did it by rising from the dead after dying on the cross.

He restored heaven to you and gave you back that eternal focus.

He lifts your eyes to more important things.

Jesus Raises Our Focus to Heaven.

Unfortunately, we often misunderstand the focus that Jesus brings.

Even though He comes to lift our eyes to heaven, we still get bogged down in the details of this earth.

We still become focused on and mired in the problems and difficulties that surround us.

“So when [the disciples] had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’” (v 6).

Will you, at this time, Lord, relieve us of this oppression?

Will you give us glory and an easy life here on earth?

Will you, at this time, Lord, make things right in our earthly life?

The young bride was indeed thankful that her groom was there.

Now he could help her with the many preparations that were needed.

After all, it was his parents that she was trying to impress! So it's appropriate that he would help her with getting ready. Maybe he could take over finishing the dishes and wiping off the counters. Then he could run to the grocery store to get what's needed. He will take the load off her and make her life easier.

Often, we look at Jesus and say, “Yes, Jesus, I know you've taken care of heaven for me. But what about right now?”

I'm struggling with all kinds of issues and problems and difficulties today.

Are you going to take away my problems right now?

Are you going to help me with the things that are confronting me in this earthly life?"

And we still don't get it.

We ask, "Jesus, will you at this time make my life easier?
Will you at this time restore the kingdom to me?"

And Jesus responds, "That's not the point."
"He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.'" "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" (vv 7–8).

I didn't come to make your life easier necessarily. But I will give you some tasks to do while on this earth.

They're important tasks. They'll make the time pass more quickly, and they'll help to keep your eyes fixed on heaven.

The groom says to his young bride, "Yes, you're right. I'll help you. But let's keep our focus on what's coming up. The point of getting the house ready isn't really to get the house ready. The point is to be prepared so we can relax and enjoy the feast. So let's put on some music and enjoy each other's company while we get ready to go out to eat."

Jesus didn't come to restore our earthly kingdom.
He didn't come to give us an automatically easy life.

But He does give us tasks to do during this earthly life.

Through whatever vocations God gives you, you are being His witness, and you have opportunity to give glory to God.

That's heavenly stuff.

He will keep you prepared with a heavenly focus.

We can do our vocations to the best of our God-given ability, and that will be doing God's work—and keeping us focused on heaven.

But then, as soon as Jesus has fixed everything, He disappears. *“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”* (v 9).

They could no longer see Him. He was obscured. He had left them. There they stood, with mouths gaping open, wondering if they had just been abandoned. Would they ever see Him again?

Was He coming back?

How were they supposed to go on without Him?

We go back to our young bride as she begins to worry. Her husband now disappears. She doesn't know where he went. What if his parents arrive before he gets back? What if she's not ready?

She starts to feel abandoned and gets frantic all over again. The feeling of abandonment is horrible. Where did Jesus go? His disciples wondered. Where is Jesus now? We wonder. And the reason they, and we, feel abandoned is because we again focus on ourselves and worry in this earthly life.

But Jesus doesn't abandon us. He doesn't leave us alone.

“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).

Yes, Jesus was gone from their sight. But He promised He’d be back. He also promised to send them a helper. He promised they would not be abandoned, and He never broke a promise.

After getting upset with the groom off somewhere on an errand, the bride noticed the note on the refrigerator. It said, “I’ll be back soon. I’ve gone to check on our reservations and make sure everything’s ready. I love you.”

Jesus has gone to make everything ready. He tells us, *“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”* (Jn 14:3).

He has not abandoned you.

He suffered abandonment on the cross so that you never have to.

He promises to remain with you until He returns.

So, while we are waiting, He sends us his Helper. He said, *“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth. . . . I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”* (Jn 14:16–18).

In your Baptism, in the preaching of His Word, and in His Holy Supper, Jesus fulfills that promise. He himself is with you, very personally, and He sends you His Holy Spirit, through His Means of Grace, so that you are never alone or abandoned.

As Jesus is ascending into heaven, He promises He will return to take you home to heaven with Himself.

In the meantime, He remains with you, His bride.
He remains with you through His Word.

He leaves you His Word to teach you, to prepare you, to strengthen you by reminding you that, by His death on the cross and His Easter resurrection, He's given you a place there with Him eternally.

He also leaves you His Holy Spirit to be with you, to guard and protect you, and to keep your eyes fixed on Him.

Every time we drop our focus to ourselves and this earthly life, Jesus raises our focus to heaven. He lifts our eyes to the big picture, to being with Him for all eternity in the joy of heaven.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the glory