

May 28, 2017
 Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter (Ascension sermon)
 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.”

1

¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

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

Amen.

Tradition has it, that the Ascension, adjusted to our modern calendar, took place on Thursday, the 18th of May in the year 30 AD. Which made it forty days after Easter, and ten days before Pentecost. Adjusted to the 2017 calendar, Ascension fell last Thursday, May 25, which fits just right since June 4, next Sunday, is Pentecost.

You know, the time and date, really doesn't matter, what matters is what happened. Our risen Lord and Savior ascended bodily into Heaven.

Have you ever wondered what it was like? I mean, imagine seeing Jesus rising into the sky, watching until He disappears among the clouds...sounds a little like a myth or a fairy tale, doesn't it? So much so that many people don't believe that it happened.

If you lean a bit in that direction, it's probably because you weren't there; it happened to those other people and was the climax to many amazing things that had happened to them just six short weeks earlier.

These were folks that had lived with Jesus, and had come to know and love Him dearly over the past three years and then on that horrible first Good Friday, they watched Him die in the most shameful way, the most cruel and terrible death that anyone could imagine.

They were shattered, they were like dead men walking themselves. No comfort...no hope...

Until that glorious Easter when Jesus declared victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil, everything changed again.

What a difference the third day made!

According to Scripture, Jesus appeared to them at least nine times after that, maybe even more. But the tenth and final time that is recorded is the one that we have just read about in Acts, when Jesus leads them to the Mount of Olives and after speaking to them, He ascended into Heaven, right before their eyes!

Even those that had been there with Jesus were astounded; no wonder some view this fact as a fairy tale.

Had we been witnesses ourselves, we would remember, even if we wouldn't have fully understood what had happened.

We would believe in spite of our wonder.

Think about it, if you have witnessed the birth of a child, no matter what science has discovered or says happens, we are there, looking on in wonder at the life that has emerged among us.

Think about a sunset, we look on and appreciate the beauty, and although we might understand the basic physics, we still can be awestruck at the depth and breadth of the colors.

God's world is full of real miracles! No matter how an unbeliever might classify them, the fact that we are here to use and appreciate God's creation is a miracle; the fact that our complex brain is even able to comprehend this creation is a miracle in and of itself.

God speaks to us, He works within us, whether we can understand everything that He tells us does not take away from His grandeur, our incomprehension does not take away from His Glory nor His perfection.

Looking at Jesus' ascension, we don't understand it, we can't comprehend it, and truly it is beyond us, yet we believe, by faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit working within us, we believe. So what do we do now?

Think of the disciples standing on the Mount of Olives, they stood there, looking up into the sky. After following Jesus for three years, they were sort of awestruck, not knowing what to do next. The Bible does not tell us how long they stood there, looking up into the sky, but finally, two angels appeared 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.”

As they stood there, you can almost imagine it, mouth hanging open, looking intently into the sky and the angels coming up saying “Excuse me, (knock, knock) Don't just stand there, do something!”

We can imagine the disciples not knowing what to do next, and then that gentle reminder to get on with the mission. The angels, sent from God to break their paralysis, bring them out of the trance and get them going again. Two men dressed in white with one message, *“why do you stand looking into heaven?”* ...

Don't just stand there! The unexpected voice of the angels brought them back to earth and probably brought back to mind the words of the Lord Himself saying:

“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.”

Jesus had told them to hit the road, to hit the mission trail under the direction of the Holy Spirit, which we know arrived ten days later during the festival of Pentecost.

So again, are we still just standing there? Looking up with our mouths hanging open?

We should all remember that we are all here by the grace of God, due to a missionary enterprise by those that have gone before us.

We might say, well I am a life long Lutheran, my parents, grand-parents, all the way back were Christians...oh really?

How many of us would actually be here today if the disciples had decided just to hang out in Jerusalem, not bothering to carry their Lord's command beyond their own door step.

Who would be here if they had not been shaken out of their daze and spent the rest of their days looking up at the sky, waiting for Jesus to come out of the clouds?

Well considering that I see no one of Jewish descent, or even if you were, I doubt that you were one of the disciples that watched Jesus ascend into Heaven, that would put the count at zero.

No one would have heard the Good News of Jesus Christ.

But they followed the Great Commission given them and carried the message of Christ out to the nations, and we are sitting here this morning, not just looking into the sky, but seeing Jesus in His Word, speaking to others as His witnesses, and knowing His blessings in our lives as we continue to live in this world.

There are many who are content to look up at the sky and patiently wait for Jesus to return...are you among that group?

Are you happy with how things are going, here in this country, with your children or grandchildren?

Well, bend an ear and listen to the angels as they say to you, "Don't just stand there, do something to spread the kingdom of God.

What?

I don't know, but when God taps your shoulder, you will know. Find your Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. You are blessed by God, now be blessed to be a blessing to someone else.

Find your niche and the Holy Spirit will bless your efforts. There is no second string in the kingdom of God; all efforts for the mission of Christ are counted as important. If God has equipped you for that task, rest assured that it is important in His Kingdom.

Not to earn your salvation, because that was taken care of already, on the cross, but out of love and gratitude to God our Father and to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

God has blessed us in His kingdom and by the Great Commission given to us by Christ Himself, we are sent to be a blessing to others whereby we are blessed further in the process.

We are blessed to be a blessing!

Amen.

And the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Sermon Outline

We are blessed to be a blessing!

Acts 1:1-11

- I. Have you ever wondered what the ascension was like?
- II. God's world is full of real miracles!
- III. What if the disciples had decided just to hang out in Jerusalem?