

Seventh Sunday of Easter – May 13, 2018

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Acts 1:1-11 (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 water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (6) Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. (8) 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." (9) After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. (10) They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. (11) **"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."**

Dear brothers and sisters of the King of Kings and Lord of Lord's:

There are many accounts in the Scriptures which stir our imaginations – accounts that just naturally seem to create a picture in our minds, accounts that we can readily relate to in some ways. For me at least the account of our Lord's ascension is one of those accounts which stir my imagination. My mind easily fills with one picture after another as I consider this account -- It's relatively easy to envision Jesus on a hillside lifting his hands to speak a blessing on his disciples, isn't it? And if we let our minds just flow with the text it's easy to picture ourselves gasping in amazement as Jesus was lifted up into the sky going higher and higher and higher until a cloud hid him from their sights. It's not hard is it to imagine ourselves staring intently up into the sky – our mouths wide open in unbelief long after he disappeared. And I suspect we could just about feel ourselves jolted back to the here and now as the two men dressed in white directed our attention earthward once more with their question – “why do you stand here looking into the sky?”

You know that's a good question for us to consider today? Why after 2000 plus years are we still looking heavenward? Our text suggests this answer:

Ascension Bids Us Look Heavenward

- 1. We know Jesus is there**
- 2. We know he is coming again**
- 3. We know what he wants us to do**

Every year we celebrate Christmas – we thrill to hear the wonderful message: to you is born this night in the city of David, a Savior – he is Christ the Lord. The very words create a picture in our minds of God's own son – in human form entering this world in all humility having taken upon himself a human nature, becoming one of us to rescue us from the grasp of sin. Every year we mark Holy Week with a series of worship services which remind us of the depth of God's love and the horribleness of our sins – for which Jesus offered his holy innocent life and shed his holy precious blood as our substitute – paying the penalty for our sins, dying our death, suffering our hell causing us to sing:

What Wondrous Love Is This (CW 120)

*What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this That caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul!*

*When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down Beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside his crown For my soul, for my soul,
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul.*

And of course each year we travel with those women to the tomb on Easter morn rejoicing to hear the angel proclaim: He is not here he is risen to which we lift our voices in song and sing I know that my Redeemer lives. Our hearts thrill as we recall Jesus promise because I live you also will live. (cf. John 14:19)

Just as we observe and celebrate Christmas and Holy Week and Easter Sunday, so it's appropriate for us to take time out of our busy schedules to pause and look heavenward in celebration of our Lord's ascension which proclaims him King of King and Lord of Lords.

There is no doubt when one reads the Scriptures that Jesus was born, that he lived, that he died on the cross and that he rose from the dead. Our text briefly summarizes these facts in this way as it sets the stage for our heavenward gaze: **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.**

And we can be just as certain that Jesus is exalted in the heavenly realms. We heard the Ascension Chronology earlier in our service. The Apostle Paul explains the significance of this occasion when he speaks of Christ being **seated at his [Father's] right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. He tells us God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.** (cf. Eph. 1:20-23)

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11 NIV)

Ascension Bids Us Look Heavenward

1. We know Jesus is there
2. **We know he is coming again**

"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."

The words of the angels must have re-enforced for those disciples some of the many things that Jesus had told them about the Son of Man judging all men on the last day. Think of some of the wonderful promises of Scripture that assure us that Jesus will come again to take us to be with him.

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:2-3 NI)

"Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him..."
(Revelation 1:7 NIV)

Although we can be sure that Jesus will come again we do not know when that hour will be as Jesus himself reminds us. **"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."**
(Matthew 24:42 NIV)

So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (Matthew 24:44 NIV)

And so while we will certainly be ever vigilant in watching and waiting for the Lord Jesus to come again in glory as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to take us to dwell with him forever in his kingdom – we can't stay here forever staring into the sky because

3. We know what Jesus wants us to do.

As our text tells us Jesus made it clear to his disciples what he wanted them to do in the days following his ascension into heaven. **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 water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."**

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit which Jesus promised would enable them to recall all that he had taught them...so that they would be able to carry out the other command that Jesus gave them immediately before he went up to heaven: **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."**

The angels' question, **"why do you stand here looking into the sky?"** was intended to spur the apostles into action – to be about the business that the Lord Jesus had given them. First off, they were to head to Jerusalem where they would receive what they needed to become prepared to witness and then they were to become witnesses of Jesus – to give glory to their ascended Lord and Savior with their words and their lives. The Lord had promised them that they would receive power to become his witnesses.

When we think about it the Lord has the same desires and promises for us. He wants us to make regular use of his Word and his Sacrament – which he promises will strengthen our faith and equip us for works of service which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

And the Lord still promises his blessings to us – giving us the gift of faith together with other spiritual gifts which we are to use in his service and bring him glory. Once again we have gathered here in celebration of the Lord's Ascension – peering heavenward. We know Jesus is there, we know he will return and we know he will bless us as we live lives dedicated to his service. Go then bear witness to the Lord Jesus as you await his blessed return. We know what he wants us to do. May the angels question to those men of Galilee, **"why do you stand here looking into the sky?"** spur us into action – to be about the business that the Lord Jesus had given us. Amen.