**Luke 24:44-53 May 16, 2021 (Ascension Sunday)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the 24th chapter of Luke here re-reading these words. “While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It must have been an amazing sight, to see Jesus Christ ascending and being carried up to heaven. The disciples, once Jesus has disappeared from their sight stood there in awe, like a crowd at the end of a fireworks show, just staring up into the sky. We see the evidence of this from our First Reading from Acts where two men in white robes stand by them, as they stare up into heaven, and ask “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?” Almost to say, “Guys…what are you doing?” While Jesus had ascended to heaven it did not mean that He had left them and He certainly was not going to be found by staring up into the sky. He had not “abandoned them as orphans” as we hear in John chapter 14. He was still with them as He promised. He had not left them to simply just stand and stare. He had given them work to do. He had taught them what needed to be done and how the Gospel would spread and Christ would be glorified through their work. The truth was that for Jesus His earthly ministry was over, all that needed to be done and accomplished was finished, and He had returned to God’s right hand, but for His disciples, the work had just begun.

The disciples had been given everything they needed and so Jesus ascends into heaven. And think about it for a moment, in our own lives, preparations are made before we depart and go away. If you are going to leave your house for a few weeks you will make arrangements for someone to pick up your mail or feed your pets. If you are a parent, and you need to leave your child behind, you will find someone to watch them. If you are a teenager, or a young adult, you know that if your parents did ever leave you alone in their house, they had adequately prepared you. They gave a list of all the emergency information you could ever need and also a good speech on what you are to do while your parents are gone. There is a certain peace that comes before you leave knowing that all of the necessary preparations have been made, and the person who is looking out for your most valuable treasures is equipped to take care of them.

That’s what Jesus had done before His Ascension. We are coming to the end of an amazing season of celebration, we have looked at how Christ has risen from the dead and that our Easter joy has not ceased even a month after Easter Sunday. Well, here in Luke 24 we see why this season is emphasized so much in the Church Year. Jesus himself says, “Thus it is written, that the Christ **should** suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.” Thus it is written and thus it had to happen. Jesus had to come and not just eat, drink, and be merry during his time here on this Earth. He had to come, and suffer, and die. It was necessary for him to do this, to fulfill the Scriptures and earn victory over sin for His Children so that they would have eternal life with him in heaven. And now that work was complete. It had been 40 days since His resurrection. Luke goes into detail pointing out in our First Reading that Jesus had presented himself alive after his suffering by **many proofs**, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. Jesus made sure that there was no doubt that He had risen from the dead, that it was the same Jesus who suffered and died. Jesus was preparing them, He had been preparing them throughout his entire earthly ministry and He’s preparing them even in these 40 days after His resurrection. Jesus was making sure that they were adequately equipped with all that they needed to spread the Gospel throughout the world.

The second part of the words of Christ here in Luke 24 say that “Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” That’s the work of the disciples, and the continuation of Jesus Earthly ministry. That mandate is echoed in Matthew 28, in the Great Commission that says “Go and Make disciples of all nations.” That is the work that they were prepared to do, and that we too are to do as Christians in this sinful world. We are to speak to those who do not know the amazing love of Jesus Christ and tell them about the one who is above any authority they could ever know. The one who became man, and is now not simply wandering through the countryside, but the one who came and dwelled with us, fulfilling the Scriptures, and who has ascended and now sits at God’s right hand, above all the powers and authority of this life. We are to tell the world about the head of the Church which is Jesus Christ, because without Christ, there is no life, no salvation, and no hope.

We are to take His Gospel, and His Word, out to this world as His disciples. He has prepared us for this work here in His House. So what are we doing now that He has gone back up to heaven? The disciples rejoiced at Christ’s ascension, returning to Jerusalem and continually praising God in the temple. Christ’s return to heaven was a moment of joy, and they worshipped him publicly, no longer hiding behind closed doors where they had dwelled after Jesus been crucified for fear of the Jews. Christ has returned to heaven, and He has equipped us with His Word, but are we faithful to the work that He has put before us? Are we transformed and sanctified Christians, living lives that are set apart to His service and His glory through the talents He has blessed us with? Or are we simply standing around with our heads up in the clouds? Are we embracing the work that He has put in front of us? Or do we just, put that list to the side, like an unfaithful child whose parent has gone away?

Now that Jesus has ascended, and is not physically present with us, do we see that as an excuse to do whatever we want, and sin boldly and openly, without any threat of punishment? The answer is yes, because our sinful nature yearns to just be free from our calling to live lives of service to God. Our sinful nature longs to put ourselves first and our own happiness rather than a submission to God’s Will in our lives. Ascension Day is nothing more than a reminder to our sinful hearts that Jesus is not physically here. He is not looking over our shoulder, He will not burst through the door when we are doing something wrong. And if he is at the right hand of God, and preparing a place for us, we are all tempted to wonder, does He really care about every little thing that we do? Is he even watching? Does sin really matter at all?

Instead of taking Jesus’ message to heart, and taking His Gospel, and His Word out into this world as He commanded His disciples, we not only ignore the things we should be doing, we gladly go and do what we know is wrong. We return to the darkness of sin, thinking that Christ is no longer present and does not care. We give in to our sinful desires, and instead of seeking Jesus, we go to places where we believe He will not look for us. We live in open and unrepentant sin. We drift farther away from His truth, and the work of His ministry.

The disciples left the mountain and immediately ran with joy back to Jerusalem and back to the temple, because they knew that the temple was the place where Christ was to be found. They did not need him to be physically present any longer because they had the truth of His Word and the promise that He would always be with them through His Word and His Sacraments. Jesus did not leave His disciples alone, He did not abandon them or simply leave them to spread the Gospel by themselves. But He sent to them the promise of His Father. He, still cared and loved them, and He equipped them to do this work in His name. He clothed them from on high with His Holy Spirit, as we will celebrate in the remarkable and monumental day of Pentecost.

And He still loves and cares for us. He has not abandoned us, but He has equipped us to take His Word and His truth out into this world. He remains with us to the end of the age. He has not left us. He remains in our presence. He promises that where two or three are gathered in His name, **there he is with them!**

He equipped His disciples to do the work that they were called to do, and so He has equipped us as well with His Word to go and serve Him in the various vocations that He has called us. Like a parent that has gone away and left their children in charge of the house, He has provided for our needs, by blessing and showering us with undeserved possessions and talents. He has left us with a list to be done, to share our faith, not as a prerequisite for salvation, but simply as a sign of thanksgiving for all that has already been done in Christ’s earthly ministry. Because the real work of salvation is complete, and was finished when Christ breathed his last and gave up His spirit. We are forgiven, through Jesus’ death, of our sins. We are forgiven for our sins of laziness when we stand in awe of God’s creation and fail to do His Will in our lives. We are forgiven of our sins of selfishness when we fail to serve God in the vocations that He calls us to and instead turn to our sin rather than God. It was all carried by Christ, to the cross, where He died and took away sin forever. His ascension is a reminder that His work was complete. And that life is found not in the pleasures of this world but instead in the Word that He has left us. In the promises of His Gospel, which is not just for us, but for all people.

To see Christ ascend into heaven would have been an amazing moment, but a more glorious one awaits all of us. For he will come again, as the men standing by the disciples promise them. Christ is gone physically for now, but He will return in glory. He will come back in the same way that His disciples saw him go to heaven. And on that day, it will not be a day of sadness, or worry, but a day of joy. A day of great joy and celebration, for He will be with us again and will take us to be with Him for all eternity. May that enlighten your hearts and give you comfort, for that is the hope that we have been called here in this world. And may all of us be strengthened with the Word of God to go out in our daily lives and serve our Lord and Savior. For His Work is done, and His love is shown in that we remain His Children, patiently waiting, for His glorious return.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.