

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
May 17, 2015
Ascension Sunday**

What Next?

- 1. *A Message from Heaven***
- 2. *Ascension brings Assurance***
- 3. *Ascension brings Opportunity***

Hymns: 370 – 169 – 351 – 727

Closing: 171

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

For 40 days, they got to forget. They got to forget what it was like without Jesus for those three days when he was in the tomb. They got to forget about the fear and trepidation that caused them to huddle together behind locked doors. They got to forget about the doubts and anger that had filled their hearts. Instead, they again got to experience life with Jesus; they got to absorb his words; they got to pick his brain; they got to enjoy the presence of God amongst them.

But now, on a hill outside of Jerusalem, it was happening once again – though in a much different way. Jesus was being taken from them. And though there had been straight talk in that time since the resurrection; though Jesus had told them quite clearly, “I’m leaving and going back to my Father;” now again it was real. Jesus was slowly ascending, almost slipping out of their reach.

As awesome as it must’ve been for the disciples to witness the resurrected Savior returning victoriously and gloriously to the Father; there had to be some uncertainty as they pondered what would happen next.

As we look at Luke’s record of the Ascension in Acts 1, he tells us that the disciples remained there “after a cloud hid him from their sight...looking intently into the sky.” I often wonder how long they were actually standing there, and how long they would’ve stayed there with their necks craned to the heavens. Was it pure astonishment? Was it hope that he would come back? Was it uncertainty about what to do next?

We can hardly blame the disciples for being unable to take their eyes off of Jesus. As we gather today to celebrate the Ascension of our Lord, we watch as Jesus returns to his Father to sit on his throne, having triumphed in what he came to do.

Today provides one more opportunity to fix our eyes on Jesus, astonished by what we see in our Savior. For six months, our time together in worship has focused squarely on the life of Jesus, watching as he did all the work of accomplishing our salvation through his life, death, and resurrection. And we give thanks that we get to observe because we could contribute nothing beneficial to that work.

But now that the Ascension has happened, our focus is to change a bit. And what happened to the disciples next is a reminder of that for us.

Whether it was for a minute that the Twelve stood there looking into the skies, or it was for an hour, angels appearing on the scene let us know that it was too long in God’s eyes. Those angels had a question for the Twelve, “Why do you stand here looking into the sky?” But it wasn’t so much a question as it was a kick in the pants for those disciples. “Move along! There’s nothing more to see!” was really the thrust of the angels’ message.

And that was the dilemma, wasn’t it? The disciples had followed and observed for three years. They had witnessed all of Jesus’ work as the Savior, but that time was done. There would be no more standing there, watching as Jesus did the work. They had seen all that there was to see.

Now though, it was their time to go and work; to take those eyes off the skies and turn them to the world that Jesus told them was their mission field. So many times, before his death, but especially since his resurrection, Jesus had commissioned the disciples. He had said, “I will be leaving, but your work of telling the world about what I’ve done is just beginning.” But now with their eyes stuck to the skies, they needed a little push. “Why do you stand here looking into the sky? the angel wondered, “you’ve got a job to do.”

And for all of us who are often better watchers than doers, may we hear that same question asked of us: “Why do you stand there looking into heaven?” the angel wonders. We’ve been given a job to do by our ascended Lord, and to do it requires that we focus our eyes on the mission field that Jesus has left us in.

The Ascension brings with it the reminder that as Christians, we have work to do as we are tasked with proclaiming the Word of God.

Yet as the angel pushes us to work on this Ascension, he also gives disciples something to hold onto as we work and witness in the world; we are also to wait. As we dedicate our lives to spreading the message about Jesus to the world, we are always to have an eye on heaven. Because as Jesus left the earth that day outside of Jerusalem, his departure came with this promise, ***“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.”
(Acts 1:11).

And so, like the first disciples, we work and we wait. We work faithfully for our Savior as we carry out his commission to us. We wait longingly for our Savior as we wonder just when he will come on the clouds as he promised. But in that working and waiting, there are so often frustrations and doubts, frustrations and doubts that every disciple has felt since Jesus ascended from this earth.

As we work for the Lord, there are frustrations when our witnessing work isn't always accepted as we hope it will be. There are doubts when more and more in world tell us that our message is no longer welcome or correct.

And there will also be frustrations and doubts as we wait for the Lord, wondering as we look at a decaying world whether he will ever come, thinking that things would be so much easier if Jesus were here to do the work for us.

And it is in the face of those frustrations and doubts that Paul gives us Ascension assurance in Ephesians 1. As we work and wait for the Lord, our frustrations and doubts can be taken away when we remember where Jesus is and what Jesus still does for us. These are words that remind us that Jesus was not leaving the world to leave his disciples behind. These are words that remind us that Jesus' work was not really finished. Paul writes, ***“(God) seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ 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. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way”*** (Ephesian 1:20-23).

Where is Jesus now? At the right hand of the Father, the place of supreme rule, authority, power and dominion. Jesus left this world, because he had a far more important place to be.

What is Jesus doing? Ruling all things under his feet, and serving as the head of the church. What a wonderful assurance it is to know that though our Savior physically left this world on Ascension, he still has his ruling hand so intimately involved in it. The ascended Lord sitting at the Father's right hand gives to us one of our greatest assurances in life, that Christ works all things for our good. And that is our answer to frustrations; it is our assurance for the doubts.

If the disciples were asking, “What next?” when they stood on that hill outside of Jerusalem, I doubt they could ever imagine what would come next in their lives. Guided by the ascended Lord, those followers would carry out work that would change

the world. They would preach to the ends of the earth. They would persevere through persecution.

Today, as we remember the Ascension, it gives us opportunity to say, “What next!” with excitement and anticipation. The Savior calls us to work. The Savior calls us to wait. And he gives us assurance because we know that from his heavenly throne, our Savior rules all things for his Church's benefit. Amen.