

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
May 29, 2011
“Ascension Sunday”**

Luke 24:44-53

Where is Jesus?

- 1. A first answer**
- 2. A second answer**

Hymns: 154 – 170 – Dist. 175—171 Closing 169

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:44-43

This Thursday is Ascension Day. Ascension Day is no doubt the most neglected of the great church festivals. Yet, it’s just as important as Christmas and Easter and Pentecost. Christ’s ascension is part of his exaltation and recognizes him as the lord of all and King of kings.

With his ascension, 40 days after Easter, Jesus withdrew his visible presence from this earth. Yet, he told his disciples, “Surely I am with you always even to the end of the age.” This may prompt us to ask, “Where is Jesus?” Many have asked that same question before. The Wise Men asked that question. They came to Jerusalem inquiring, “Where is Jesus? Where is the newborn king of the Jews?” Mary and Joseph asked that question. When Jesus stayed behind in the temple as they traveled home and nightfall came they asked, “Where is Jesus?” Mary Magdalene asked that question. Early Easter morning she came to the tomb. When she saw the tomb was empty, she asked someone whom she thought was the gardener, “Where

is Jesus?” I once asked that question of the school children. Some said, “Jesus is in heaven.” Some said, “He is here, with us.” Others said, “Jesus is in both places.” Let us this morning consider this question, “Where is Jesus?”

For thirty-three years Jesus lived and walked on this earth. Thousands of people saw him with their own eyes. They heard him with their own ears. They touched him with their own hands. Great crowds followed him wherever he went. He came on a mission. He said, “The son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life as a ransom for many.” He said, “For this reason the Son of man was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” On Good Friday Jesus cried out from the cross, “It is finished.” With his work on earth completed, with his mission accomplished, Jesus was now ready to return to his home in heaven.

Where is Jesus? In our text for today, we hear Jesus saying to his disciples, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Old Testament believers found Jesus in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. They found Jesus in the Old Testament festivals and ceremonies. The Old Testament was filled with prophecies and pictures and details about the coming and work of the Messiah who was Jesus. His virgin birth, his birthplace, the flight into Egypt, the return to Nazareth, his betrayal, his death on the cross, the pierced side, the burial in a rich man’s tomb, the resurrection, were all foretold in the Old Testament. Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Isaiah and Jeremiah all found Jesus in the Old Testament Scriptures. In the rite of circumcision, in the Passover lamb, in the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, Old Testament believers found Jesus.

Where is Jesus today? We should not imagine that Jesus is now confined to heaven and no longer here on earth. Before he ascended into heaven he assured his disciples, “Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Today we can still find, hear, see and touch Jesus. Where is Jesus today?

- He can be found in his word and sacraments.
- In Holy Baptism he comes to us and makes us members of his family and heirs of eternal life.
- In the Lord’s Supper we touch Jesus as he gives us together with bread and wine, his true body and blood for the personal assurance of the forgiveness of all of our sins.

- We see and hear Jesus in his word. In his word, we hear the stern Jesus pointing out and rebuking sin.
- We see the forgiving Jesus who says, “Son, daughter, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.”
- We find the lowly Jesus who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.
- We find the living Jesus who said, “Because I live you will live also.”
- We find the compassionate Jesus who says, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”
- We find the ever present Jesus who says, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”
- We find the strengthening Jesus who promises to never give us more than we can bear and who promises to make all things work out for our good.

Today we find, hear, teach and see the ascended Jesus in his word and his sacraments. The word and the sacraments are the Christians lifeline to Jesus. That’s why the apostle Paul said, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” That’s why the writer to the Hebrews said, “Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.” That’s why David said, “I was glad when they said unto me, “Let us go into the house of the Lord.” Where is Jesus today? He is very near. He is in your heart. He is found in his word and sacraments. Concerning the Scriptures Jesus said, “They are they which testify of me.”

Now before his ascension, Jesus reminds his disciples of how everything that had happened had been foretold. He says, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.” Then he reminds them of what they were to do in his name when he was gone. He said, “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples were left to tell all the world what they had heard and seen. They were to preach and teach the law and gospel. They were to urge sinners to repent, and comfort repentant sinners with the announcement of God’s forgiveness.

In order to equip the disciples to do this work, Luke tells us that Jesus did two things.

- First of all, “he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures,”

- and secondly, he gave them a promise.

He said, “I am going to send you what my father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” The Father had promised to pour out the Holy Spirit. Ten days after Jesus’ ascension, on Pentecost Day, these disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and with power, and beginning in Jerusalem, began preaching about all the things that they had heard and seen.

What the disciples had heard with their ears, seen with their eyes, touched with their hands, felt in their hearts, they were to share with others. We too are to be witnesses, so that through our actions others can see Jesus, and though our words others can hear Jesus. Are you thinking, “I can’t do that. What if someone asked me a question I couldn’t answer? I don’t have the training of the disciples or of a pastor or teacher.” Witnessing does not involve delivering an involved theological essay. It is stating the simple, yet profound truths of law and gospel, our sins and God’s grace in Christ. It is sharing with others what Christ means to you what hopes you have because Jesus is your Savior. It’s simply stating the threefold truth we heard in the absolution this morning and in hymn 406, *“Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!”*

Today Jesus says to us, “You are witnesses of these things.” Now, “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” Many people do not know where Jesus is. Will you tell them? Will you help them find him?

As Jesus gathered his disciples together one last time on the Mount of Olives near Bethany, he lifted up his pierced, now glorified hands, and blessed them. Those hands were not simply waving goodbye. Those were forgiving hands still bearing the marks of the nails. Those were open hands inviting all people to come to him. Those were the protecting hands of the Good Shepherd. Those were the powerful hands firmly in control of our life and our world. Those were the soft and gentle hands that blessed the little children and helped the poor and needy.

Where is Jesus today? We can see him in his blessings. His hands are still lifted high in blessing us. What a wonderful world he has made for us to live in. He sends the sunshine and the rain. He makes the seed grow and produce crops. He gives us food and clothing and shelter. We see his blessings here in our churches; children and adults being baptized and confirmed,

couples being married, saints being buried, God's children gladly serving him with their time, talents and treasure. We see his hands raised in blessing as repentant sinners come to his supper, spiritually hungry and thirsty souls come to eat of the Bread of Life and drink the Living Water. We see his hands raised in blessing as children sit at the feet of Christian teachers in our grade schools, high schools, Sunday Schools and colleges and as eager students attend a variety of Bible Classes. Even though he ascended into heaven with his hands raised in blessing, and his work of redemption is finished, he is not inactive. He intercedes for us. He hears and answers all of our prayers. He reigns and rules over all things in the interest of his church. He is preparing a place for us so that where he is we may be also. See Jesus in his blessings when you travel and when you sit at home, when you eat and when you sleep, when you work and when you play, when you worship and when you pray. Our ascended Lord is still active as our prophet, priest and king.

When Jesus left this earth, you might think his disciples would have been sad but we read, "Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple praising God." The doubts of Easter evening had vanished. They had not been left as helpless orphans. Jesus opened their understanding of the Scriptures, he assured them that he would be with them and he promised them the Holy Spirit. Their life would never be the same again. It would have new meaning and purpose and direction. Where is Jesus today? He is invisibly present in all places, also according to his human nature. May you too, like the disciples, go home rejoicing because you know where Jesus. Amen