

Ascension Day Service June 5, 2011

“Woman” he said, “Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Jesus continuing says “Mary.” Mary turns towards Jesus and cries out in Aramaic “Rabboni” (which means teacher). Mary sees both angels and Jesus but only believes when she hears him call her name. Thomas also requires something more than sight to believe....He needed to touch Jesus’ wounds before he believed..... Thus with Mary personal encounter begins the story of the 40 days before the ascension which was to become the day that Jesus rose to heaven. Through the years I have discovered that sometimes people get the ascension event at least a little confused with the resurrection, which of course has overshadowed the ascension event. But I must say the ascension event is of equal significance, and careful attention should be given to it.

According to the accounts in the Gospel of Luke and in Acts, which was written by Luke, Jesus appeared to many of these disciples during the 40 days following his resurrection. On the 40th day, he came again to the Apostles and sends them to the Mount of Olives where he instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Then, as they were watching, he ascended into a cloud. As they continued to watch, two angels appeared and declared to them that, just as he ascended, Jesus would return to them the same way he left. Five times New Testament writers use the Greek term ***analambano*** “to take up” of Jesus’ ascension and that the “taking up” was empowered from above..... namely by God. There he is seated on the right hand of God, the Father, (by this we mean a place of prominence.

Unlike Christians today, the disciples lived, walked and touched Jesus while He was on the earth. Whenever He talked of departing from them they probably became deeply distressed. It was almost certainly not something they wanted to think about.....I sense all of us who have had loved ones depart can understand that feeling of lost. Nevertheless we know that God's will had been done and that those who have died in Christ are with the Lord.....The good message is that we can all anticipate spending eternity with our loved ones in the presence of our Lord.

So what is so significant about the ascension!! What should we learn and understand about the ascension?? This morning let us consider four important consequences of the ascension.

First of all the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was implemented by the ascended Christ. Matthew 3: 11 - John the Baptist says "I will baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry". And again we are reminded in our reading of Acts" He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." This spirit baptism means we have been placed in union with one another in the body of Jesus Christ.

Joel 2:28 – 29... "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.... Your sons and daughters will prophesy.....your old men will dream dreams..... and your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit."

The Old Testament had long made it clear that a new heart would bring a person to God. So when Jesus ascended he left a provision

of the Holy Spirit..... that is a new heart, sometimes also referred to as “regeneration”. And today we know that, that power of the Holy Spirit is what you and I all have to continue God’s work here on earth.

Second, this supernatural event resulted in the establishment of the church of Christ. Yes, in this book of Acts is recorded what our Lord continued to do and to teach through His body the church. One of the most significant words in the book in verse one of Acts is that little word “began”...Quoting Acts “I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven.”

It is important to remember the Lord’s words upon the cross, John 19:30 - when he cried out “It is finished.” Sometimes these words on the cross are misunderstood. Certainly the Lord could say the work of redemption was accomplished ...in other words man’s debt for sin could be marked “paid in full”But... but the Lord did not say “I am finished” in a sense that His work on earth was completed. No, today the work of proclaiming that salvation is still going on. The exciting thing to realize is that our Lord’s teaching and work continues on earth!!....How? Well of course through his body, the church.....our church.

Third, the ascension of Christ’s demonstrated the manner of Christ’s final return. Acts 1: 11 – “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.”... Matthew 24: 30 - “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and all nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.” Hebrews 9: 28 – “So Christ was scarified once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring

Salvation to those who are waiting for him.” However Acts 1:7 states... “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his authority.” Instead of being concerned about the date of His return we are given the task of continuing to testify to others the truth of the gospel.

Fourth, the ascension of Christ points out the fact that we Christians are asked to accept the responsibility of carrying out His will on earth as he reigns from heaven. Jesus’ parting words commissions his people to make disciples of every creature among the nations throughout the earth.

Matthew 28:19 -20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the ages.”.....Luke 24: 47 – “and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name.” So we are all asked to repent.to recognizes the wrong we have done and to change our ways.... furthermore we are asked to help others to learn repentance....resulting in the benefit of forgiveness to all who believe!

And again what does the ascension mean to you, me and all Christians today?? It is not, (repeat) it is not primarily to be viewed as the conclusion of our Lords’ life and ministry... but instead as a new phase of His ministry.... how, well through His church, through our congregation, through all believers which are empowered by the Holy Spirit... And today we know that that power is what you and I all have to continue God’s work here on earth.

The ascension is a confirmation of our faith and our assurance that we have a steadfast anchor of our spiritual being that allows us to remain forever with Christ. Quoting Matthew 28:20 – “Teach and obey everything I have commanded you... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Because the Lord died for our sins on the cross and was ascended to God the Father... we now have someone who can sympathize with our weaknesses.....Today we can be certain that through His grace you and I can receive both mercy and help in our time of need!

Finally the ascension should create a sense of expectation for all believers..... Just think, He will return some day, just as He departed. That assurance, alongside the power and strength of the Holy Spirit, encourages all of us..... yes all of us to continue God’s work in these intervening days.

Psalm 110 - Verse 1 is perhaps the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament..... Just think.....A thousand years before our Savior’s birth..... David prophesied the ascension of Jesus when he announced that he, Jesus would sit at the Father’s right hand.

At first the disciples struggled with the concept of Jesus’ death... Therefore in John 14:12 Jesus gives the disciples encouragement by saying: “Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing”.

He will do “even greater things” than these, because I am going to the Father”. These “greater things Jesus mentions would become works and miracles by the disciples and by us Christians left behind.....works done in the strength of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus send from the Father. In addition, quoting, Matthew 26:24 Jesus again announces that he would be “sitting at the right hand of Power”. His ascension therefore was one of the greatest tests.....greatest tests of Christ’s credibility..... it behooves all of us to believe that it happened just like it says in the Bible!

Benediction:

Jesus said, “I must go away... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.....Now don’t be sad because I will come back again! Tell my story everywhere.....be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. “

May God bless our service this morning and may the power of the Holy Spirit be with you throughout this new week... Amen!