

Ascension Sunday – Year C
May 16, 2010
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Luke 24:44-53
Pastor Paul Horn

Listen to Jesus' Ascension Promises

- I. His Work is done
- II. Our Work is just begun

⁴⁴ 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." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ 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." ⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Have you passed that elderly couple walking together through the park, holding hands and you wished to yourself, "I hope that's a picture of me and my spouse when we're old and gray." I met with a prospect last month. Her husband had died earlier this year and he was only in his 50s. As she talked about him, tears streamed down her face and she said, "I lost my best friend. We had so much we wanted to do." Like walking in the park, holding hands, and growing old together...

I can imagine that this woman can relate to the grief felt by Jesus' 11 friends at his death. Their teacher, friend, and companion, but most of all, their Messiah, was now dead than a doornail! But imagine the change in emotion three days later, as he stood before them proclaiming, "I am not dead but alive! Touch and see! It is I! I told you this would happen! Don't be sad!" And now, it's been only 40 short days and he's leaving them again! There's so much to talk about, so much instructing left to do! I'd be sad to see my friend go again, to have my heart run through the emotional wringer. But notice the emotion Luke captures in the disciples' hearts after Jesus departs and leaves for heaven. **"Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God."** (vs52-53)

Why were they so happy after he had left? I don't know about you, but I don't like it when loved ones leave, even when the grandparents come for a short visit on the weekend. But it's especially hard when a loved one leaves through death. We often ask, "Why did they have to go now?" We question God about all sorts of things, don't we?

Why is it that when my spouse is deployed or on TDY the kids always get really, really sick? The week I really need the car it's in the shop. Why is it that when I go to the doctor, 50%

of the time he says, "We need more tests," or "You need another surgery." Why is it that this relationship with my good friend, my coworker or even my spouse has gone sour, and is no more... why God? Why are we struggling through the growing pains of a growing congregation? Why this struggle to try and figure out how we will provide the best facility to do God's work of reaching the unchurched? Why do we struggle with the growing weight of guilt from past sins bearing down on our soul and we ask, "Why did I do that?" Why do I have to go through all this?

God does not always provide a quick answer, or when the answer is made clear, it's not always the one we want to hear. The blanket answer for all of our questions is, sin. Sin is the reason people die. Sin is the reason why things will go wrong in life. Other times it's your own fault, you made stupid choices. But when we give in to our fear and despair and throw up our hands and say, "I quit!" then we ought to be afraid. Because we're asking God to stay away and let fear and despair take over our lives, because we've given into them.

But he doesn't do that, instead, out of his grace, his pure love for us, he tells us that we must go through many hardships before we can walk through the gates to Paradise. Out of his grace, he shows us what we didn't have to go through to be privileged to walk through those gates.

Vs46 **"He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."** What was written by Moses, Prophets and in the Psalms, foretold all that Messiah would do to pay off the huge debt that the human race had tallied up with their sins. You thought you were depressed over your financial debt, or gasp when you hear the amount of our national debt, it's nothing compared to the debt you owed your God for your sins. But listen to what Moses, Prophets and Psalms tell us.

Through Moses the LORD promised in Genesis 3:15 that an offspring of the woman would undo the work of the serpent who began this awful debt, by crushing his head.

Through the Prophets – Isaiah told what the Messiah would do on earth; he will give strength to the weary, 42 he will open the eyes that are blind, he will free captives from prison (sounds a lot like the demon possessed, doesn't it?). (Isaiah chapter 40) That Servant of the LORD who accomplished all of those kindly acts was Jesus Christ – acts done to prove his claim of Savior – acts which were performed selflessly, humbly, always with a servant's attitude. That's not something any of us could ever do to pay God for; a sin-free life to enter the gates of heaven. Jesus accomplished it for us and paid God in full with his life.

Through the Psalms – through King David in Psalm 22, the LORD predicted what would happen to himself, "I will allow them to pierce my hands and feet, my God will forsake me, I will be poured out like water, my strength will be dried up." In Isaiah 53 he said, "I will be pierced for the transgressions of the sinners. I will be oppressed and afflicted. I will be led like a lamb to the slaughter. I will pour out my blood, like a sacrificial lamb, to pay off all that debt the human race owed my Father." Jesus Christ was that sacrifice, he was that Lamb, to put an end to all sacrifice. Nothing more needs to be done. He's done it all for us!

Have you heard of Dave Ramsey? Dave Ramsey is a nationally syndicated financial guru. On his daily radio program people from around the country will phone in and tell Dave how much they sacrificed to pay off all their debt. Mr. Ramsey then has the callers count down, 3- 2- 1 and then they scream, "We're debt free!" They're so happy to have that bad financial debt monkey off their back.

I wish the Holy Spirit had recorded Jesus' facial expression when he cried out of from cross, "It is finished!" Might it be possible that there was a smile on his face, knowing the great thing he had just accomplished? The debt is paid! The perfect life and perfect sacrifice are done! So you and I can scream, "We're debt free!" Not because of anything we have done, but because of everything Jesus has done for us. No more payment for sins needs to be made or can be made. It's done! Accomplished! But there was one last thing for him to do.

Moses and the Prophets and Psalms foretold it. In Psalm, through David, God said, "**You will not let your holy one see decay.**" Jesus' body did not rot in the grave. He took his body back again and physically rose from death, and over a period of 40 days appeared to his disciples at various times to prove it. He had to rise from the dead to defeat the final enemy, death. Now, you will not fear your grave. It's done, complete, finished!

It's no wonder the disciples returned to Jerusalem with tears of joy, singing and praising God! They now had courage and hope to face anything that life threw at them, because they took to heart all that their Savior and Friend Jesus accomplished for them. The debt of their sins was paid in full. Eternal life in heaven was theirs. As they were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, thrown to lions, crucified, beheaded, they were still filled with joy. Their eternity was secure, because Jesus' work was done. There was no reason for him to stick around on earth anymore.

When we question God and wonder, "Why do we have to go through this garbage to get to heaven?" Well, there's some things we don't have to do; suffer God's wrath for our sins; spend eternity in hell; wonder if we've done enough. Those things are taken care of. Instead, we have hope, because Jesus' work is done. So when our bodies are run through the MRI machine, when our flesh feels the cold steel of a doctor's scalpel, when relationships are ruined, when the car breaks down, when loved ones are called home, when a group of brothers and sisters in Christ struggle because the future of their congregation is uncertain, when we kick ourselves for past sins, we will have comfort, we will have hope, we will have confidence, because forgiveness of sins is ours. Heaven is ours. The debt is paid for. His work is done. But our work is just begun.

Long gone are the days of the newspaper boy on the street corner trying to sell papers by crying out the headlines, "Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Kentucky politicians balance the budget!" On that first Ascension Day that's exactly what Jesus told his disciples to do; to be heralds, to proclaim a message. And we know that our Savior wasn't just telling his friends on the Mount of Olives to messengers of good news.

vs47 “**...and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**” The command extends to all nations, to the whole world. All disciples of all time have been given the great commission to go and preach the good news that Jesus’ work is complete. He’s giving us work to do. We may not have the resources or ability to go to the ends of the earth, but every month we are sharing the gospel in Thailand, Hong Kong, the Dominican Republic, to the Apache reservations, in Cameroon and Brazil when send our congregational mission offering to our Wisconsin Synod. And we spread the gospel to our community with newspaper, streaming video, e-mail, snail mail, doorhangers, flyers, internet website, text messaging, marquee signs on the front of buildings... But in the Gospels, Jesus gave us an excellent example on how to proclaim the gospel. He talked to his friends, his family, his enemies and sometimes complete strangers.

Did you know that over 80% of all first time guests to worship or Bible Study come because you personally invited them? Do you have a friend or family member you need to talk to this week? Do you have a coworker or casual acquaintance you need to talk to this week? Invite them to worship or Bible study, so that they, too, might come and hear and believe that his work is done for them. Since his work is done, our work is just begun, and for that work we say, “Here am I, Lord, send me!” Amen.