

Ascension of Our Lord

May 21, 2020



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

And the gospel should really not be something written, but a spoken word that brings forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done. That is why Christ himself did not write anything but only spoke. He called his teaching not Scripture, but gospel, meaning good news.

– Martin Luther –

A Brief Instruction on What to Look for in the Gospel, 1521. LW 35

Acts 1:1–11

In these opening verses of Acts, Luke establishes the distinction that exists between what Jesus began in his life and ministry and what the Holy Spirit will continue to do through Jesus' disciples. The first book (the Gospel of Luke) tells what Jesus did and taught. The second book tells how that work would be carried on into the new age. The transition between the two times begins with Jesus' ascension into heaven.

The disciples who had followed Jesus are now apostles, "sent ones." They were sent out to declare the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. As they stand, watching Jesus disappear into the heavens, they are quickly brought back to earth by the appearance of the two men dressed in white. The apostles have work to do. They cannot simply stand there, staring at the sky, waiting for Jesus to return. They are to be about the business of sharing the Good News.

- *What are some ways that we do the equivalent of staring at the sky waiting for Jesus? In what ways are we tempted to ignore this world by searching for the next?*
- *In what way are we "sent ones," too?*

Psalms 47

The psalmist sang of God's victory and described the future glory of Jesus' ascension saying, "God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." The Lord is king over the whole earth, indeed the whole creation. His love for his people is recalled with praise and thanksgiving.

- *How is the ascension of Jesus one more example of God revealing his true identity to the disciples? Did they need to see this moment to believe it?*

Ephesians 1:15–23

When we meet someone and their response to hearing our name is, "Oh, I've heard about you," most of us probably have a mixed reaction. We wonder what someone could possibly have heard about us. Was it good or bad? True or false? A flash of panic can accompany such a statement.

Our reading from Ephesians includes just such a statement: "I have heard about you." But what's been heard is that the Ephesians are people of faith in Jesus Christ and love toward all the saints. This is the reputation the church in Ephesus has achieved. It would be nice to think every church has such a reputation.

- *If someone told you they had heard about your church, what*

would you think they had heard?

- *When you speak of your church to others, what do you say? What would you want people to know about your church?*

Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit would open the eyes of the Ephesians to see more clearly who Jesus is and what he is accomplishing.

- *How does increased knowledge of Christ help the Ephesians in their work of being the church? How does it help us?*

Luke 24:44–53

The vision of Christ's ascension contains a clear statement of the task being handed over to the Church. Jesus' followers are to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all the nations. The Church is to bear witness to the saving work of Jesus Christ.

In the intervening years since Jesus spoke these words, the Church has taken upon itself, or has had placed upon it, all sorts of additional tasks. While many of these additional tasks are worthwhile and desperately needed by the world, at times these tasks can distract from or even take the place of the primary calling of the Church: to proclaim Christ.

- *What are some secondary tasks in which your church is involved? Do these tasks ever take priority over the proclamation of the Gospel? What are some ways the daily demands on a pastor can impinge upon the work of proclaiming Christ?*

The disciples were told to stay in the city until they received power from on high. This foreshadowed the events of Pentecost while also serving as reassurance that what they were about to witness was not the end of the story. It isn't easy to stay put and wait for God's time when we have our own ideas about timing. This word to the disciples is a helpful reminder that we are not in charge of the mission of the Gospel and that it is only through the power of the Spirit that we can faithfully serve as Christ's witnesses.

- *Can you think of times when you have not wanted to wait for God's will to unfold? Why wouldn't the disciples be told to go out immediately and tell everyone they met?*

The high point of this reading comes as Jesus' ascends into heaven. This moment could have been seen by the disciples as the end: Jesus' work was done and he was going back to whence he had come. But through the Holy Spirit, Christ's work continues. The forgiveness of sins continues and the resurrection wasn't just an historical event. Forgiving sins and raising the dead is what Christ continues to do and what the church proclaims in his name.