

Sermon 2007 Ascension
Text: Luke 24:44-53
Theme: "Power"

As we come to the day of the Ascension we celebrate the second to the last key transition in the ministry of our Lord, Jesus Christ: his birth, his epiphany, his transfiguration, his crucifixion, his resurrection and now his ascension. Throughout the world tonight Christians all over are either ignoring this night or getting it wrong.

The vast majority ignore it. After all, it comes on a Thursday. Who goes to church on a Thursday? If the Lord had wanted us to mark this day with celebration, he should have done it on a Sunday – like the important days, like Easter and Mother's Day! But alas, Jesus is rarely convenient. So, at least in this country, it is up to us - the few, the proud, the Liturgical to celebrate this important day.

However, even among the few who celebrate it, most get it wrong. I see all manner of sermons about saying goodbye to Jesus. I hear comforting words that say that we should not mourn for although Jesus is gone from this earth, he is still with us in Spirit. I see sermons comparing the Ascension of Jesus to

the death of a beloved relative. Now he's up in heaven with Grandpa and that favorite dog of his, Old Blue and they are having a wonderful time...to bad for us, huh? We still have to exist in this slow misery called life. Well of course Grandpa is indeed with Jesus and for all I know, Old Blue might be there too, but while Grandpa and Old Blue are limited to the realms of Heaven until the resurrection of the dead, Jesus made it very clear to us when he said, "...and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world." Always means always. So tonight we are not celebrating Jesus going away since he is right here with us.

Now don't go and get all metaphysical on me. Don't start thinking of spiritual presence and auras and spiritual energy. When Jesus says he is with us, he is with us whether or not we happen to be able to see him with our limited mortal vision. The fact that we don't get that is the reason we mess up so many other things. When I take kids on trips, I don't have many rules, mostly because I can never keep track of them myself. One of the things I say, however, is "before you do, say or think

anything, ask yourself if you would do, say, or think it if Jesus were sitting right beside you...because he is." The same rule works in the adult world too.

Before you start wringing your hands and having a big boohoo worry fest, ask yourself. "Would I be doing this if Jesus were sitting right here with me saying, don't worry about it. I got you covered." Before you talk that client into spending more money than he really needs too, ask yourself. "Would I be doing this if Jesus were sitting at the table with us looking at me with one eyebrow raised as if to say, 'you too Judas?'" Before you ignore that hurting person because you don't want to give the time, expend the energy, or just because you don't particularly like him, ask yourself. "Would I ignore him if Jesus were standing there looking at me the same way he looked at Peter when Peter denied him?"

See? We celebrate Ascension as though it is a farewell party because we like it that way. We act like a houseful of teenagers whose parents are going away on vacation for two weeks and entrusting the house to us. "Yeah, sure, you bettcha Jesus. You

just leave the place to us and enjoy yourself. We'll take good care of everything." Then as soon as he's in the clouds, out come the beer and cigar. I heard a teenager say once that the prettiest lights at Christmas were the tail lights of his parents' car as they headed to the airport for a two week trip to Hawaii.

This is not a farewell party. Jesus never left! He ascended. He took on more power and more glory than he had carried during his earthly ministry. Remember that the Nativity is not when Jesus came into existence. It is when the second person of the Holy Trinity laid down some of his cosmic power to squeeze into a fleshly body and be physically born of a woman so that he could complete the work necessary to pay for all of our sins. The Resurrection is when the second person of the Holy Trinity proved that he was too powerful for death and the devil and the grave could not hold him. The Ascension is when the second person of the Holy Trinity reassumed his complete power and glory. **Our God has not left on vacation.** He has risen to power and authority beyond our ability to fully comprehend.

What kind of power is it that can speak a word and in speaking, create from nothing whatever was spoken? What manner of power is it that brings to life a man who had been dead not for a few minutes, but for THREE DAYS? In this day and age when we can blow up almost everything very efficiently, we have yet to comprehend the kind of power that can see into hearts and create faith. This is amazing power.

This is the power of our God. He is not something other, that lives somewhere else and checks in on us from time to time to see how we are doing. Our God lives right here with us day in and day out. There is never a moment when he is not with us. And lo I will be with you ALWAYS! That is what we celebrate tonight. Why would we worry about anything? The creator of the universe is sitting right beside us and has his hand on our shoulders. He is constantly whispering in our ears..."I'm bigger than that...whatever *that* is."

And sin is no mystery to him. He lived on this earth and knew every temptation we face. And as we face temptation after temptation, he sits right beside us with his hand on our

shoulders. He is constantly whispering to us..."You're better than that. You're bigger than that. You can resist because I'm right here with you."

And sorrow? He was a man of sorrows. He cried when Lazarus died. He felt the sting of the Roman whip more than once. He saw one of his best friends sell him out and another deny him. He is sitting right beside us with his hand on our shoulders. He is whispering in our ears..."it's going to be okay. In fact it will be better than okay. Soon it will be glorious and everyone you think you have lost will be with you again but this time forever and this time in paradise."

Ascension Day is not a farewell party. It is a celebration of who our Lord is and because of him, who we are. We are the children of the most-high God and heirs to the eternal kingdom. And remember, I said that Ascension was the *second* to the last key transition. The last is the second coming when the process will be completed and we will all receive our glorious inheritance. AMEN.