

**Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church**  
**Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena**

**May 24, 2009**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**  
**Ascension Sunday**

**Acts 1:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

**Luke 24:44-53**

<sup>44</sup>Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

<sup>50</sup>Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup>While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup>and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

**“Up Your Up-Ness”**

**“...so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”**

**“Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.”**

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**Ask someone where God is and people will almost instinctively react by looking or pointing up. God is in some faraway place often referred to as heaven. Not the complete story is it? As we search the pages of Scripture and as we listen to the great theologians of our ages past and of our age too—we encounter another view of God.**

**We encounter a view of God where God is not distant and remote, but God is close at hand. God is here. God’s presence and power permeates all of creation. God is not merely heaven bound, but also earthy, incarnate, and indwelling of everything—even us. The Holy Spirit of God resides within our mortal bodies. It is that breath, wind, Spirit of God that gives us life and sustains life—both in this living form and in our own resurrections when we are raised up as Christ has been raised from the dead.**

**Yes, God is here. God is there. God is everywhere. The comfort that provides is no matter where we travel we are never away from the presence and ministry of God to us. That is a given. It is always there. It is always real.**

**We experience that presence of God in the Holy Spirit. It is because of Pentecost that we have received the power and life of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling.**

**The disciples were told to remain in Jerusalem until they were “clothed with power from on high.”**

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**Here, seven weeks into the celebration of Easter and the resurrection we are almost at that moment of delight in the “power from on high” of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is next week. First we have the ascension. After the resurrection and prior to Pentecost there is this holy feast day of the ascension. It takes place 10 days prior to Pentecost. So, the day of Ascension was last Thursday.**

**We celebrate it today. It is where Jesus takes the disciples out to a high mountain and there he blesses them. And while he is still blessing them he is taken up into the heavens. Up, up, and away. We are told that the disciples worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. We are also told that they were continually in the temple praising God.**

**I love that Salvador Dali painting as I can just picture being one of the disciples standing there being blessed by the Savior. And all of a sudden you are looking at the soles of his feet as he is levitating towards the heavens. I would think that in amazement and stunned we would be standing there with our eyes and heads lifted up and our mouths gaping open in pure awe.**

**Jesus has told us that this day would come...and here it is. He is ascending to the Father, “to my God and to your God...that where I am there you may be also.”**

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**I do not want us to miss the dynamic movements here. There is more than transfer of place going on here. This is not just about how Jesus gets from hither to yon. There is more going on. Notice the action in the story. Sure, what stands out is the on earth and then looking at the soles of his feet as he is ascending and then eventually it is mere clouds. Wow, but the action here is on the part of Jesus.**

**He is blessing them.**

**This is not a NASA launch. He does not bless them. Finish that. Then there is a count down. Then there is a blast off, and off to heaven he soars. Nope. That is not the sequence.**

**He is blessing them. And he continues to bless them. And as he is lifted up—what is happening? He is blessing them. Notice that—it is huge. He does not cease to bless them. That is final earthly action, and it continues to be his ascended action too. It demonstrates the dynamic, the action, the movement, the interaction with us of the resurrected and ascended Christ. It is one of blessing.**

**Blessing. Blessing. And more blessing. And continual blessing.**

**Understand that such is how this Christ is still present to you today. Blessing you.**

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**We need to up—increase, strengthen, magnify...we need to up our up-ness. We need to replay this scene of ascension on our living and literally stop and look up and see that Christ is blessing us. That is the action of Christ on our lives.**

**Consider blessing. What does it mean that Jesus blesses you? What does blessing mean? It means an acknowledgement, a recognition, there is a sense of praise and approval there too. It means that something has a holy aspect to it, there is that sense of take off your shoes you are on holy ground.**

**Yes, really consider that. Really do, because God in Christ is blessing you. Do you get that? Do you really get it? God is blessing you! God is blessing you! Not just a quick God love you...it is more than that. God is delighted in you.**

**God is pleased by you. God longs for you and so loves you that God wants to be in your presence. God delights in you. You are such a part of God's creation and God's joy—live in that and know that God is blessing you.**

**Understand that the issue of blessing is not that we need God to bless more of us—it is not that we need God to bless more of our life. God is blessing us. We need to come to a recognition and a realization of the blessing of God in our living and upon our life.**

**We tend to reserve a recognition of the blessing of God on our living for the places where we have it all together and we are at our best. That is not the limit of God's blessing. God also blesses us in our fears and our challenges and our mundane too.**

**Do you think the disciples were also somewhat fearful as they stood there and watched Jesus be taken up into the heavens? Of course they were—but Jesus was blessing them in that fear too. We need to see and comprehend that Jesus is blessing us in the places where we fear and where we feel apart from anything holy or spiritual. In those places of weakness and struggle, and yes even sin—in those places the blessing of God is there too.**

**Widen your view of where God is delighting in you. Widen your view of where God is blessing you. Widen your view of where God is longing for you. It is much larger than you and I tend to perceive.**

**It encompasses everything—when we are at our best, when we are at our worst, when we are feeding the cat, and when we are cleaning up the mess after dinner. There is not an activity or a place in our living that is not alive with the presence of God!!**

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Perhaps one way for us to get that is to pause in our routine. Maybe we need to pause, just stop in those places where we experience fear or challenge or question or struggle or ho-hum mundaneness of it all—maybe we need just to pause and look up and picture those feet of Jesus ascending up and notice the dynamic that he continues to bless us.

Up our up-ness, we need to up our up-ness or our conscious recognition of that power and presence of God longing for and delighting in us—blessing our living. God is amazingly interested in us!

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Notice to what else we see in this encounter of the ascension.

The disciples response was worship. There on the mountain they worshiped him. And when they returned to Jerusalem they were continually in the temple praising God.

Worship and praise of God are the central means by which we discover who we are. Worship is in us. It is at our core being. We were built to worship—we were built to be in communion and in relationship with God. We feel at home when we allow ourselves to be swept up into that amazing presence of God that is our worship life.

Worship. Worship. Worship. It will center us. The church is about worship. It is the worship life that forms the core and center of all that we do. We participate in the Sacramental life in worship. It is the place where the mystery of God meets the reality of our living in this age and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is not hidden but visible in Word, table, font, song, love, offering, dance...

The response was worship. This ascension thing was something they had never experienced before. Their response to that which was new was worship.

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**There is that one other detail in the text. “They returned to Jerusalem with great joy...” “...with great joy!”**

**We spend so much time in the drudgery of life. We are so busy we don’t have time for joy. There are too many stressors and pressures in order for us to have joy. You think? I don’t. I think that is bunk. I do. I don’t think we are any busier than anyone else ever was. We are just busy in a different way.**

**I think back to how life was. I have to tell you I am busy, but I never have to get up at 4:00am to milk cows. I have never had to go and gather cobs or cut wood in order to keep the stove burning. And I have never had to bake bread in order to have some bread to eat.**

**The issue, I believe has less to do with busy, and more to do with joy. I think we use busy as an excuse for not facing the reality that so much of what we do seems meaningless in our lives. And it feels meaningless because we have made what we do, including our jobs, our primary means of having meaning.**

**Now that is backwards, what we are to bring to our job is our understanding of meaning in our life. What we are to bring to all our interactions and relationships—even our relationship with ourselves is our understanding of where meaning comes from.**

**It does not come from how many widgets you produce or how much paper you push or how much money you make—meaning comes from your relationship with God.**

**Why did the disciples return to Jerusalem with “great joy?” Because they had experienced the reality that all the promises of God had come true. When Jesus told them the Son of Man would be crucified, would die**

**and would rise again, did they get it? No. But they witnessed it. Over and over again, the promises of God were real for them.**

**For us...over and over again...the promises of God are real.**

**So when Jesus says, go to Jerusalem and there you will be clothed with power from on high—they could return to Jerusalem with great joy believing and knowing it would come about.**

**And we who are on this side of Pentecost and waiting for the promise of return to come about—you bet we can believe that the promises of God are real.**

**So we can have this joy. It is a joy that is deeper than happiness. Being happy is a temporary. Joy endures. Joy is there even as we face death and the deepest tragedies in life—joy is there. And we have it in us...**

**...allow that joy that is planted in you to be felt by you.**

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**Just at that moment when you don't feel any joy...when you are about to pull your hair out in frustration...or when those blahs come along that we all face....stop. Stop. I mean stop right in your tracks. And lift your head up...lift it up and see that Jesus is blessing you.**

**See that Jesus is blessing you and allow that joy to inhabit you. Just look up and worship for a moment and allow that blessing of God to fill you. It is there...it is here...it is in you.**

**Some day we will know it, as the apostle Paul puts it, face to face, but now we may just have to stop. We may have to stop, look up, and up our up-ness. Amen.**