

May 24, 2020

But you will receive
power when the Holy
Spirit comes on you;
and you will be my
witnesses in
Jerusalem, and in all
Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of
the earth.
Acts 1:8

Introduction and Welcome

Call to Worship:

Today is the day when we remember that Jesus ascended into heaven to be with God. The disciples were to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them, and so they spent their time worshiping and praying and praising. Let us worship our God as we hold onto the promise and presence of the Spirit with us even now.

Reading the Word: Acts 1:1-11

Message: "Don't Just Stand There"

Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

Prayer:

Holy God, you sent Jesus so that we might have life now and forever. Through baptism, we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit and commissioned to be your disciples in this world. We are called to witness to our faith in the ways we speak, act, and live. Guide us as we seek to be faithful witnesses for Christ in our world. Give us insight and wisdom as we live in the midst of a pandemic. Help us to find ways to minister to each other and others, even from a distance. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Blessing

Acts 1:1-11

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 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. 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; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The Ascension of Jesus

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 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.”



SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY
REV. DR. DEB HANSON

Ascension Day
Dramatic Reading by Sam Hargreaves.
Based on Acts 1.

Whoosh! Just like that! Like a rocket, Zoooomm, that's how he went! Better than any fireworks I've ever seen! Wheeeee! And we were watching to see where he was going when a cloud came across, and, well, that was it. Gone. Ascended.

I didn't want him to go. He'd already left us once, and that was awful. We just didn't know what to do with ourselves, we moped around, fearful for our lives, fearful for our sanity. I mean, he was our hope, we'd left everything for him. And he had promised that he would never leave us or forsake us. So when he died, what did that mean? Wasn't he who we thought he was? Was he a fake or a fool, or even a fiend? So many questions and doubts.

We needed him, he was showing us the way, the way to be human, to live without the legalism of the Pharisees or the rule or the Romans. But it was just those things, the rules and the rule, which caused his death. I just didn't understand.

Then he came back. He came back! Who has ever come back from the dead! (Well, except Lazarus, and that little girl, and... er, well, perhaps I should have trusted him a bit more.) Anyway he rose again just like he said he would. And he gave us convincing proofs he was alive, showing us his wounds and eating fish and everything! I mean, ghosts don't eat fish, do they?

And he spoke to us about the Kingdom of God, and it all started to make sense, all that stuff we'd heard before but hadn't really grasped until, well, until he'd died I guess.

One time when we were eating he said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

I got all excited and said "Lord, Lord are you this time going to restore the Kingdom of Israel?"

He looked at me in his way which means "you haven't quite got it yet, have you?" I'm getting used to that look.

He said, "It's not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set for his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Whoooosh! Zoooooom! Gone! Ascended. Before I'd even had chance to ask him what he was going on about. And we are all standing there looking up into the sky like a load of ninnies, when we hear a voice, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?" Fair question I guess. They must not have seen the Whoooosh! But now that I think about it, they did look pretty amazing themselves, all white and shiny, like people from heaven.

They said "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."

I looked at my watch and was about to ask if they could give an estimated time of return, but they had already gone.

So here we are back in Jerusalem. We are praying and waiting, waiting and praying, and I can't say I'm not excited about the coming of the Holy Spirit, whenever that might be. But to be honest I'd rather Jesus came back himself. I need him. No one knows me like he does. No one shows me God like he does.

But I guess even more than that the world needs him. Israel needs to be restored, God's Kingdom needs to come to this world, and Jesus is the only one to do it, I really believe that. But I'm worried that not one Jesus would be enough, it's like we need God to send maybe 100 or 1000 little Jesus', going around and spreading his Kingdom. Little Christs, empowered to do his work. We can't do it, we are useless. Come on God, we need your help!

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Comments and reflection on this reading by Rev. Deb