

It's Not the End of Jesus

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” Acts 1:8.

We like to jump to the end. Whether it's stories, or games, or movies or songs or yes, even sermons, we want to get to the end! How many of us as the service lingers on think what the little ones vocalize to their families so well, “Home? Do we get to go home now?” And that's how we frequently look at our weeks too. As Monday rolls around, we're already pining for Friday! We hardly have to start a week before we long for the end of the week to come! Likewise, with summer, it isn't even officially upon us yet but we can find ourselves already looking for the hot and humid weather to end. Teachers and students are just beginning summer plans and yet it won't take long before the dread of the end of summer hits long before that day arrives. We even do this with relationships. We want to fix the problems before we even listen and learn what the issues are completely. We want to get to the results without having to go through the journey to get to those results.

This temptation to jump to the end can come from a variety of reasons. Sometimes, we're just quick to draw conclusions because of time. Other times, we make hasty assumptions because we think we know best. There are times we want to get to the end so that we can move on and know what to do next. When we can sense the end, when we know it's closing in, we often don't want to deal with the growing anticipation and expectation. Let's just skip all the in between stuff and get to the finish! Our desire to know how things end can overwhelm our willingness to appreciate and endure everything that comes before the end.

Having such a nose for the end can be a struggle when we consider Jesus' ascension this weekend. Some of the verses and the actions they share could easily make us think that things are coming to an end. Hearing that Jesus is taken up from His disciples and then hidden from their sight by a cloud seems like that logical, clean closure to a movie. Then onto the backdrop of the cloud that just covered Jesus pops the words, “The End”, and then the credits begin to scroll.

This temptation to see Jesus' ascension as the end puts us in danger spiritually. As we do with so many other things that come to an end and then go out of our sight in this life, it so often is the same story with Jesus. With Jesus out of sight, we can quickly put Him out of our minds. If we see this ascension moment as the end, with Jesus out of sight, it'll be very easy for us to push His promises out of our minds. If we see this ascension moment as the end with Jesus out of sight, we lose purpose and focus on things that take us away from our purpose. If we see this ascension moment as the end with Jesus out of sight, we lose sight of hope.

In the ascension account from Acts, we are reminded that this ascension moment isn't the end. Even though Jesus would be taken out of the disciples' sight, He certainly wouldn't be out of their minds, hearts and lives. For the disciples, Jesus would continue to have impact on everything they did. Even removed from their sight, His promise to them remained, His purpose for them was clear and His return was their hope. For the disciples, this ascension moment was an affirmation of their Savior's ongoing presence.

Now as Jesus' disciples centuries later, this ascension moment continues to affirm for us the same Savior's ongoing presence in our lives. His return is still our hope. His purpose for us is clear and His promise to us remains. While Jesus remains out of sight, He isn't absent and His work continues in and around us daily. This weekend as we remember Jesus' ascension we too are reminded that this isn't the end of Jesus and His impact in our lives as well.

First, in Acts 1:4, we hear Jesus' active promise as He tells His disciples to wait for the promise of the Father, **“you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”** Ten days later, on Pentecost, those disciples would experience the fulfillment of this promise. Quickly these disciples would learn and see, that this outpouring of the

Holy Spirit wasn't for them only but for all Christians. With each new believer, with each new outpouring of the Spirit, these disciples would be reminded that the Ascension wasn't the end of Jesus but that He remained with them through His promise.

Generations later, Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit remains active in our day. As God's Word takes root and grows in our lives, as we are forgiven and are led to forgive, as we remember our baptism daily, as we receive communion regularly, these are evidence of Jesus' promise actively at work! These are the staples of the Holy Spirit's outpouring on you and me today and from these Spirit-driven actions we too are reminded that the Ascension isn't the end of Jesus but that He remains present with us even now through His promise!

Second, in Acts 1:8, we hear Jesus' clear purpose for His disciples, **"... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** The disciples' purpose was to share what they had seen and come to know during Jesus' earthly ministry. They weren't to focus on the unknown – on things like when restoration would come to the kingdom of Israel. That wasn't their business or purpose! They were to proclaim to all people, Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the call to repentance and the promise of forgiveness to the repentant. Their purpose would affirm for others Jesus' ongoing presence and that His ascension wasn't the end.

By God's grace and strength these disciples carried out their purpose very well. This weekend, it's their Spirit-guided words and witness that affirm for us Jesus' ongoing presence even in this moment. It's their words and witness that God uses to give us the clear purpose of continuing to proclaim Jesus' life, death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins in our homes, our communities and our world. Just like those disciples before us, we focus on what has been made known to us through the Bible leaving what is unknown to God and His perfect plan. By God's grace and strength, as we carry out our purpose, many others will come to know about Jesus' ongoing presence in this day and age and that His ascension wasn't the end.

Third, in Acts 1:11, we hear of hope rooted in Jesus' return as the angels share with the disciples, **"... This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."** This is the last place in our ascension account from Acts that we hear the disciples being reminded that this ascension moment isn't the end. They aren't left with despair, emptiness or regret, but are filled with joy and hope that their Savior would return someday to take them to the place He has prepared for them so that they might be where He is.

The disciples' hope of Jesus' return is our hope this day too. He is preparing a place for us in heaven so that we might be with Him as well. Someday He will return to take us to what He has prepared. Our God hasn't forgotten us! This ultimate hope is what we cling to as despair, emptiness and regret seek to ruin us. Jesus' ascension isn't a moment on which we end, but rather as the hymn writer puts it, Jesus' ascension is something on which we build: "On Christ's ascension I now build / The hope of my ascension / This hope alone has always stilled / All doubt and apprehension; / For where the Head is, there as well / I know His members are to dwell / When Christ will come and call them." (*Lutheran Service Book 492:1*)

On this side of Jesus' ascension, we still have certainty and assurance of Jesus' personal impact, His ongoing presence and His loving care. He may be out of sight, but by His Word and Sacraments, He most definitely isn't out of our minds, hearts, bodies and souls. His promise to us remains. His purpose for us is clear. His return is our hope. My dear friends in Christ, Jesus' ascension most certainly isn't the end and this finally is the end of my message. May the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our risen and ascended Lord, Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan