

The Ascension Of Our Lord
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Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Acts 1:1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "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." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by 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." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? 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." (NIV)

When we have family or friends over to our house for a visit and it's time for them to leave, my children have started this thing they like to call "the wave." They will walk out with our guests and as their car is pulling away my kids chase after it running down our yard and waving until those friends or family are too far away or out of sight. I picture Jesus' ascension being somewhat similar. I would imagine that the disciples wanted to make this goodbye last as long as possible. After all, we read how when Jesus is taken into heaven His disciples are left standing there gazing up into the sky.

Good-byes are often very sad and hard - especially if the people leaving are close to you - especially if you know it will be a long time before you will see your loved ones again. But the thing I want us to recognize on this day we are celebrating, yes celebrating, Jesus' ascension, is that this is not a sad good-bye. Make no mistake, the disciples loved and were closer to Jesus than anyone. It is also true the disciples would not see His face again for some time - for some it would be a long time. Yet, this departure was anything but a time for grieving and tears. This morning, as we look to Luke' account, I pray we see why: **Christ's Ascension Is a Good Good-bye.**

Luke begins this letter: *"In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen."* Luke writes this letter, as he did with his former book - his Gospel, to a man we know very little about, a man named Theophilus. While we know little of this man to whom Luke's books are addressed, there is no missing the subject of his writings. Luke's focus is on Jesus, the Savior of all. Luke says his Gospel is all about what *"Jesus began to do and to teach*

until the day he was taken up to heaven.” Jesus’ earthly ministry and His work as our Savior has been completed and now Jesus is about to ascend into heaven. But not before *“giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”* These disciples had some wonderful work in front of them. Much of that work is written about here in what we call the Book of Acts or as some refer to it the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus’ ascension is a good good-bye because Jesus would still be doing and teaching many things, now through His disciples.

Jesus does not leave them until they are ready for this work. We read, *“After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”* For the past forty days Jesus made sure of one thing. The disciples knew the grave is empty and that salvation has been secured. Jesus ate with them, showed them his hands and feet, comforted them and taught them. One time Jesus appeared to 500 of His disciples so that there would be no doubt about it. The Savior lives. Forgiveness is theirs. Sin can’t control them and the devil has no power over them. Death and hell have been vanquished. Jesus is not saying a sad good-bye at all!

In fact, before Christ ascends He gives them a promise. In Jerusalem the Holy Spirit will be sent to them in a special way. This gift, this promise, will equip them to carry on the work Jesus is leaving for them. That special outpouring of the Holy Spirit would take place just ten days later on Pentecost. They *“will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes”* on them. And yet the disciples again show some weakness and misunderstanding about Jesus’ kingdom. They want answers to things they are not meant to know. How often don’t we do the same? We focus on what God doesn’t tell us instead of all the wonderful things He does reveal to us. We foolishly at times take our eyes off of God’s promises and look for answers that are not for us to know.

May Jesus, in love, quickly turn our attention back to His Word and work as He did with these disciples. Jesus simply tells them they will be witnesses who tell the world what they have seen and heard. They will tell about all they saw Jesus do and teach. They will speak of how they saw a man who never sinned or even once turned away from the will of God. They witnessed Jesus live a perfect life and do so in the sinners stead. They will tell others how Christ obeyed all God’s laws because we needed righteousness. These disciples are also eye witnesses of how Jesus did away with sin, our sin, by carrying it to the cross, by enduring the punishment all sin and guilt deserves. They will tell others about an unforgettable suffering to save them. They will speak of innocent blood shed to wash their sins away. They will speak of the Savior who they saw die for them and come back from them dead to assure them forgiveness and peace are theirs in His name.

The disciples will speak this message at home, and then in the country surrounding them, and then to the ends of the earth. They will speak boldly, even willing to lay down their own lives so all people can hear this good news. They were ready and confident because the Spirit would equip them for this work and Jesus would still be with them. Jesus was going for their good to a place of all power and authority, the right hand of God, where Jesus rules and controls all things for the benefit of His Church. That’s why when *“he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight”* this was a good good-bye. This is a good good-bye because as the angels told the

disciples ***“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.”***

Think of having family or friends stay with you for a long time. If it was time to say good-bye how would you feel if they left you after eating all of your food and ruining most of your possessions? How would you feel if they cost you your job and ending up free loading for so long your bank account and savings is completely emptied? That would probably not be a very good good-bye, because the only thing good about it, is the fact they are finally leaving.

But what if a loved one came and stayed with you for three years and filled your house with more food you could ever eat and left you with more possessions than you could ever count? What if this love one while he was with you provided you with a great job that gave your life purpose & meaning, and filled your bank account with millions and millions of dollars? What if that someone who was leaving also promised that although you would not see His face for a while he would be watching over you and making sure you are taken care of? What if that person promised to come back for you to take you to Hawaii or some other place you always dreamed of going? Would that not be a good, no a great, good-bye!

Christ’s ascension is even better! He leaves this earth after providing everything we need and more. His Word and Sacraments are here to feed us and fill us daily. He leaves behind blessings of life, and forgiveness, and peace, and hope and prayer. Jesus gives us spiritual blessings more than we can count and of greater worth than gold. Jesus promises He will be with us always to the very end of the age. When Jesus comes back, in the same way these disciples saw Him go, He will take you and me and every believer to place far greater than Hawaii. We will live with Jesus in heaven.

This, dear friends, is why Christ’s ascension is a good good-bye. Jesus leaves us with everything! In fact, Jesus goes up to heaven to assure us He will never really leave us. Jesus equips us to do His work and gives us good news - the best news of all. We have a Savior who has already done it all for us. Our sins are paid. The grave is already empty. Life is ours. So men of Galilee, people of Amazing Grace, ***“why do you stand here looking into the sky?”*** We have a message to tell, a Savior to proclaim, a victory to celebrate! This is the joyous message of Christ ascension! Amen.