

The Ascension of Our Lord

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Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 24:44-53

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

"What happened here?" the police officer asks trying to get information on what caused the accident or who committed the crime. The people nearby what took place are asked to testify to the things they have seen and heard. They are asked to be witnesses. "Did you see that?" your friend asks you when at the Reds game Brandon Philips makes a diving pick up and beautiful throw to just get the runner out at first. Your buddy wants to make sure you saw the same amazing play. You are a witness. This is what a witness does. A witness testifies to the truth – a truth that can be either good or bad. A witness tells what they have seen and what they know. That's it. It isn't any more complicated than that.

And this is good news because that is the job the Lord gives to you and to me. We are to tell others what we have seen and what we know. Today, Jesus says plainly "***You are witnesses of these things.***" We will consider now the task our risen and ascended Lord has given to His disciples. I pray we realize and relish this truth: **We are Christ's witnesses.** Witnessing for Jesus is an easy thing. Witnessing for Jesus is a joyful thing.

After Jesus' resurrection He spent 40 days here on earth. Jesus spent this time to prove beyond a doubt that He was alive and to prepare His disciples to be His witnesses. Jesus wants His disciples to be absolutely sure as witnesses. Jesus makes witnessing easy. Why? "***He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."***" It is easy to be a witness for Jesus because everything God had said about Jesus is always fulfilled. Just look at the Old Testament! God doesn't keep His Word some of the time or most of the time. God keeps His word all of the time - 100% guaranteed! So we are able to give bold witness to everything God tells us. Think about this. The Scriptures promised the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, flee to Egypt, and be raised in Nazareth. Isaiah said the Christ would heal the sick & give sight to the blind. The disciples were witnesses of these things. I could exhaust you with example

after example. It is easy to be a witness for God because His truth always stands. Everything written about Jesus is fulfilled.

Jesus now finished His most important work. The meat and potatoes of Biblical prophecy was fulfilled. The disciples were witnesses of these things. ***"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*** This is another reason it is an easy thing to be Christ's witness. Jesus has done all the work. Jesus' completed the work of saving all people. On the cross Jesus suffered for the sins of each and every person to ever live. He paid in full for all the price of sin and death. Then Jesus swallowed death up in victory as He rose from the dead. Life, forgiveness, salvation - these blessings are ours. As witnesses all that is left is to speak the truth - to proclaim repentance & forgiveness of sins in his name.

Did you catch in these verses one more thing that makes being a witness for Jesus an easy thing? ***"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."*** Not even the apostles themselves could by their own thinking or choosing come to believe in Jesus as their Savior. God had to open their minds. The Holy Spirit had to give them understanding of the Scriptures. Why is this good news for us? It is not ever up to us to bring the results. We are only witnesses. We only proclaim the truth. Certainly, we will attempt to proclaim the truth of God's law and gospel clearly and to the best of our abilities. But it is the Lord who brings the results.

Too often we shy away from being Christ's witnesses because we are afraid we won't know what to say or someone might ask us a question and we might not know the answer. Sometimes our sins and laziness gets in the way or we think it is the job of pastors and others who have been trained. This is why this is a good reminder for each of us. Jesus tells us ***"you are my witnesses."*** Do you know what Jesus did for you to save you? Then you can tell others the truth. Do you know that you are going to heaven and why? Then you can tell others what you know. That's all a witness needs to do.

While being a witness for Jesus is an easy thing, Jesus' command could seem a bit overwhelming when He tells His disciples to be witnesses ***"in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world."*** That seems like too much for me - to reach the ends of the earth. But not when we start where the disciples are told to start. They are told to proclaim ***"repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*** They are told to be his witnesses, starting at home. I pray our witnessing also starts at home. Parents, talk about Jesus with your children. Children, talk about Jesus with your parents. Talk with your spouses, brothers, sisters, grandkids and relatives. What kind of witnesses will we be if we are not witnessing in our own homes and families? Then we can go out to Judea and Samaria. Carefully consider to whom you might witness Christ. This summer try to target some people you know among your friends, neighbors, co-workers and associates. Always be prepared to tell others about Jesus. This is how the gospel is reaching the ends of the earth - one person at a time.

As you witness for Jesus I also pray you find this a joyful thing. You might think that these disciples would mope around for a while after Jesus returns to the right hand of the Father. We might think that their work might lose some of its luster without the Son of God visibly present with them anymore. But this is far from the case. ***"When he had***

led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.”

These disciples return home to Jerusalem with great joy in their hearts. They go and worship their risen Savior who ascended into heaven but promised that He would never leave them. They return to the temple where they continue to praise God. How could they not after seeing Jesus ascend, blessing them as He lifted high His marked hands? The wounded hands reminding them of His forgiving grace. The hands of love that will continue to protect, and gather, and comfort His sheep. The hands of their Lord that remain firmly in control of their lives and this world. So they go in joy, great joy. They go to praise and worship God and to be Christ’s witnesses.

On a battlefield a soldier had an artery of his arm lacerated severely by the fragment of a shell and he was bleeding to death fast. A passing physician bound up the artery and saved his life. As the physician was leaving the man cried, “*Doctor, what is your name?*” “*Oh, no matter,*” said the doctor. “*But Doctor,*” cried the man, “*I want to tell my wife and children and everyone I know the name of the one who saved me.*” Isn’t that the same joy that fills our hearts? Don’t we want to tell others the Name of Him who saved us? Witnessing for Jesus is a joyful thing.

I hope all of you will be able to attend in three weeks from today when we have a special examination/confirmation Sunday. Lord-willing we will have nine young people come up here and simply do one thing. They will be Jesus’ witnesses. They will have a chance to tell God’s truth and share what they know. They will confess their faith with us. It is probably good for them to be reminded once again that this is an easy & joyful thing. The only reason witnessing for Jesus becomes difficult, the only reason it becomes anything less than joyful is because of our sins. Yet, our Savior who makes us His witnesses continues to take all those sins away. He washes them from us with His blood. He is here to give us the strength to do better.

If you are a fan of the NBA which is in the middle of the playoffs and even if you are not a fan I’m sure you have heard of LeBron James. He is regarded and it is now almost indisputable that he is the best basketball player in the world. In fact, at one time he had some commercials running where people wore t-shirts that simply read witnesses. People are proud to witness and want others to know they have seen the great things this player is doing on the basketball court. How much more proud are we as witnesses to the great things Christ has done? He ascends having done everything He came to earth to do to win us salvation! He has opened for us the door to heaven. He continues to open hearts and minds. I pray the Lord makes us bold and joyful witnesses for our Savior. I pray we witness to others with our words, with our actions, and with our lives. We are Christ’s witnesses – and that is an amazing truth! Amen.

