



Acts 1:1-11

Ascension, May 17, 2026
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In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ 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." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

"God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet." (Psalm 47:5) That's how the Holy Spirit described this event in Psalm 47. God ascending, there's shouting and there's trumpeting. But those shouts and those trumpets must have been in *heaven* heralding Jesus' *arrival*, because I *don't* think that's what the disciples were doing as Jesus departed.

As they stood there, looking up into the sky, I imagine it was with tears clouding their vision. What thoughts must have been running through their minds—"Where do we go from here?" "What do we do now?"—if they could even formulate any thoughts at all. They were all alone! Suddenly *alone*. They had climbed that hill as twelve, and now they were eleven. Jesus was gone. What cause could they possibly have to break out their trumpets or shout for joy now that Jesus was not there?

Forty days before this, there was a similar occasion. The women had gone to the tomb, and they found that Jesus was not there, He was gone. Two angels appeared and confirmed their suspicions, **"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here..."** (Luke 24:5-6) But that time it was very *good* news that Jesus was gone. Good news that the tomb was empty.

Here again, Jesus is gone. A group of eleven stands on a hill, looking up. Then, suddenly, eleven becomes thirteen: two angels—maybe the same two angels—are speaking to them. "Why are you looking up into the sky? Jesus is gone." And this time, that is *still* good news. It was **good news because Christ's Ascension** meant, firstly, that **I. Jesus' work here was done**. And it also meant that **II. Jesus' work here had just begun**.

Christ's Ascension probably doesn't rank very highly by general consensus among Church holidays. *Interesting*, sure, but not particularly important. Christmas? Very important. Easter? Vital. Ascension? Again, interesting, but not *important*, right? And that's too bad, because Scripture gives Jesus' Ascension *great* significance. During the forty days post-Easter, Jesus had **"presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about**

the kingdom of God.” He was eating with them, walking with them, talking with them, allowing them to touch Him. He was appearing before them and then *disappearing* from their sight, just like that.

And if the Ascension was unimportant, then Jesus could have simply said farewell and disappeared on the spot as He had done many times the previous forty days. But *instead*, it's clear that Jesus considered His departure *important* for the disciples to witness. In our Gospel reading, we read, **“And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.”** (Luke 24:50-51) He *led* them to the site of His Ascension, because He *wanted* them to have that final image of Him ascending into *heaven*. He wanted them to know *what* His departure meant. It meant, first of all, that **Jesus' work here was done**. That is to say that Jesus' work of *redemption* was done.

We often say that Jesus' resurrection on Easter was the Father's stamp of approval on the Son's entire redemptive work. And that's true! Paul had told the philosophers in Athens, in last week's sermon text, that Jesus was returning to judge the world, that He was the righteous One whom God had appointed, and that this was *proved* by the resurrection: **“Of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”** (Acts 17:30) He also writes to the Romans that we have received grace from God through His Son, and that Jesus was **“declared to be the Son of God. . . by His resurrection from the dead.”** (Romans 1:4) The resurrection proves that what Jesus declared from the cross was true: **“It is finished.”** (John 19:30) *All* that was required to forgive your sins and pave the way for your salvation had been accomplished, paid in full. And the Father raising His Son proves it. But Jesus' Ascension proves just the same thing, it is *further* proof of God's acceptance.

In the Apostles' Creed, we confess: “He ascended into heaven.” But Christ's Ascension was not only something that *He* did, it was also something done *to* Him. Listen carefully to what our text says, **“And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”** Here's how the Evangelist Mark describes it, **“He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.”** (Mark 16:19 NKJV)

According to those verses, Jesus not only ascended into heaven, He *was taken up* and *received* there. Those verbs are in the passive voice, meaning that the action was not being done *by* Jesus but *to* Jesus. The *Father* was the one taking Jesus up into heaven, because **His work here was done**. He had fulfilled all that had been given Him to do, He had brought to completion God's plan for saving you.

Think of it this way: when Jesus was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, *God* came down to earth. The Holy God came down and took on human flesh to live among sinful people and to redeem sinful people. And the Ascension is the opposite of that. In Christ's Ascension, human flesh goes up to live in heaven with the Holy God. The Father accepted and took up and received our human flesh into heaven—and He assures us He will do the same for us as well. After all, He promises, **“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.”** (Philippians 3:20-21)

Jesus' work here was done. All that was needed for you to be granted a spot in heaven has been accomplished, nothing else needs to be done. But that does not mean that *Jesus* is no longer doing anything. That's why I also say that **Jesus work here had just begun**.

And it's not just me who says that. Look at our first verse: ***"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up..."*** This is the Evangelist Luke writing these words. The first book to which he refers is his gospel, which we call "Luke." And everything in that gospel, from Jesus being born in a stable and laid in a manger, to Him remaining behind in Jerusalem to be about His Father's business, to His baptism in the Jordan, to His miracles and His teaching, even through his death and resurrection and ascension into heaven, Luke sums all of that up as: ***"All that Jesus began to do and teach."*** Which implies, of course, that Jesus is *still* working. And that's something we want to remember.

In the Apostle's Creed, again, we confess, ***"He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty."*** Now, I know when I was younger, I thought that meant that God the Father has His right hand out and Jesus is seated on a chair on top of the Father's palm. I know now that's *not* what that means. *You* know that's not what that means. But we still might get confused about what that means. We sometimes have this idea of Jesus ascending into heaven, work accomplished, sitting and enjoying some well-earned rest while leaving all of us behind here on earth, unconcerned with us anymore. And that's just not true. Jesus being seated at the right hand of the Father does not mean He's resting on His laurels; it means He is reigning as King over everything.

Right now, as I speak Jesus is using His almighty power to work in this world, in the Church, and in our individual lives. Now, that's not something that's *easy* to see. In fact, we often fail to recognize that because what we see is a world filled with war and terrorism and crime and hatred and natural disasters and poverty and starvation. We see the Christian Church attacked on every side. We see sickness and pain and suffering and loss and death and loneliness even in our own individual lives.

So instead of focusing on the daily headlines or the nightly news, we should be focusing on Paul's words in our epistle lesson about the good news of the Ascension. God ***"seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body."*** (Ephesians 1:20-23)

You belong to the body of Jesus. You are a member of His body. And just as you and I take care of our bodies, so Jesus takes care of His. He is using His power over all things for your good; sometimes giving, sometimes taking away, but always for your good. Knowing that, we can say, "I may be sick, but Jesus is in control. I may be struggling with finances, but Jesus is in control. I may be worried about my nation, I may be afraid for my children, but Jesus is in control." That is what it means that Jesus ascended and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

Now the disciples knew this as well, at least, they knew Jesus to be the King who was bringing the Kingdom. But they *were* a bit confused on the details. ***"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'"*** Now, usually, we look at that as a dumb question, as further proof that the disciples just didn't know what they were talking about. And I do think they didn't know what they were talking about, but that doesn't make it a dumb question.

I think this is a good question, actually. Go back and read the enunciation of Jesus' birth to Mary, where it is declared that ***"the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will***

reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:32-33) They knew that Jesus was the King of kings, that He was going to establish an everlasting Kingdom. And so, I think theirs is a *good* question, especially when Jesus had been speaking to them for forty days ***“about the Kingdom of God.”*** The natural question is, “Ok, Lord, when? Are you going to do it now?”

Of course, they’re thinking of Jesus reigning in a visible way, here on earth. And that just wasn’t to be the case, as Jesus had said, ***“My kingdom is not of this world.”*** (John 18:36) But Jesus *is* going to come back on the last day and raise the dead and usher in a new heavens and a new earth, where the spiritual kingdom and Christ’s spiritual reign will become visible, and we and all those who die in the Lord with faith in Christ will experience that Kingdom in *physical* reality.

And so, their question wasn’t necessarily a *bad* question, but the answer wasn’t for them to know just yet. And so, Jesus answered, ***“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”*** Don’t worry about when all of that will come. Instead, concern yourselves with this: ***“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.”***

Jesus’ work here had just begun. Jesus ***“began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up,”*** and then after He ascended, He *continued* to do and to teach. As He promised, ***“not many days from now,”***—in fact ten days from this moment—He sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples, on Pentecost, and they began to preach starting in Jerusalem and expanding to Judea and then Samaria, and eventually that message reached the ends of the earth. Eventually that message reached Okabena, MN—a tiny farming town where Jesus the Lord of all continues to work, continues to teach.

To us here, today, Jesus continues to send the Holy Spirit to work, every time the Gospel is preached. Here in this church, even when only two or three are gathered for a Women’s Bible Study on a Thursday afternoon, Jesus is present with them as He promised. Every time we receive the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gives of Himself to us—His own body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. All of this is work that Jesus continues to do, for you. Ruling for you, reigning for you, working for you. Because His love is for you. His Kingdom is for you. Jesus is for *you*.

And that is what Jesus’ Ascension means. It is much more than just a goodbye. In fact, it is not a goodbye at all. Jesus wanted His disciples to witness His ascent and to understand what it meant. ***“And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.”*** (Luke 24:50-51)

The last image the disciples had of Jesus was with His two hands raised in blessing. Two hands which still bore and will always bear the marks of His love—those scars which He received for us. Consider those two crucified hands of the Ascended Lord—the two hands which govern the world, the two hands which controll every aspect of your life, the two hands which reach out to embrace you and to serve you—consider those two hands still raised over you in blessing—consider them, and you will understand the **Good News of the Ascension**. Thanks be to God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.