

“Worship, Wait, Pray and Get to Work!”

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
Ascension Day! Luke 24:44-53 / Acts 1:1-11  
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

*The power of the Ascension is that Jesus now resides in both earth and heaven. We are called to carry out God's mission with the power of the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit at our backs.*

If you're like me, we've all had a time in our lives when we've thought, "If only Jesus was here and I could sit down with Him in Person!" Yes? Anybody out there?

If only Jesus was here...well, He's not. And He is!

Have you ever seen a movie or been to a play where one of the main characters isn't seen for perhaps the whole time or even a good portion of it? On the TV show Seinfeld, Bob Sacamano is referenced on multiple episodes. He's the guy who lived with Kramer for a year and a half. He's had rabies. He sells hats for \$40 apiece. Bob went into the hospital for a hernia operation, it went bad and now he sits in a chair by a window, repeating, "My name is Bob!" ([https://seinfeld.fandom.com/wiki/Bob\\_Sacamano](https://seinfeld.fandom.com/wiki/Bob_Sacamano))

In this TV series, Bob is a real guy with crazy ideas that Seinfeld, Elaine, Kramer and George interact with but he never appears in person on the show. And if you can believe what you read on the internet, Bob was a real friend of the show's writer, Larry Charles.

Ascension is just a little bit like Bob Sacamano. Jesus physically departs earth, but is still very much active and alive.

Here's where we are in the whole arc of Jesus' life. As Pr Carlos told you last weekend, we are still in the Easter season. We're still celebrating Christ's resurrection...until today. Today, you may have noticed some differences in the way Luke tells the Ascension story and how the Ascension is recorded in the book of Acts. In Luke, Jesus' ascension happens on Easter day or very near it. But in Acts, Jesus' departure takes place 40 days later.

In those 40 days, the disciples have seen the Risen Lord eat bread and pass through locked doors. This is no ghost! Jesus has a real body and eats, talks and sleeps just like all of them. Yet, in the arc of the story, Jesus cannot stay on earth forever. He must return to be with God the Father who sent Him to earth in the first place. As He goes to God, He now is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is Lord and King of all creation; heaven and earth.

Before we go any farther, let's talk for a minute about "Heaven and Earth." At funerals when a loved one dies, we often say, "She's gone to heaven to be with Jesus." We think that heaven is up there, somewhere in the sky; in the cosmos....who knows where.

Yet in the Bible, Heaven and Earth are one complete creation. Think about a soccer ball. A soccer ball is the outside of the ball – the synthetic leather – and it is also the inflated rubber bladder on the inside of the ball. We think of that ball as one complete object. They are two interwoven parts made into one.

In the Bible, heaven and earth are one object. One place. Earth always contains another dimension and that is heaven. Heaven is not out in the cosmos somewhere where we cannot find it or touch it. Heaven and earth are the two halves of God's creation. "Two interlocking spheres of God's reality." (NT Wright. Acts Part 1; For Everyone. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky. 2008. Pg. 13)

Therefore when Jesus departs and returns to God the Father, He now again inhabits the God space of creation, or 'God's dimension of reality'. While humans remain in the earth space of God's creation. First century Jews would have understood that. Because Jesus has been to both spaces, and clearly was at home in both spaces, on Ascension Day, we say, Jesus is now Lord of Heaven and Earth.

Jesus is not here and yet He is! Jesus' last words to the disciples in both Luke and Acts are to wait and stay until God sends the Holy Spirit. (That's Pentecost – next weekend!) Thus they wait and worship and pray and wait and worship and pray and wait and worship and pray.

Wait. Worship. Pray.

Those are not necessarily the words that embody our lives are they? So very often we hurry on to the next thing without stopping to reflect. Without stopping to thank God. Without stopping....at all. In worship we 'wait upon the Lord' for comfort and strength. We pause to listen for that still small voice of God that is at times desperately trying to get our attention!

The faster we go it seems more addicting it gets! A colleague of mine once said, "I'm not even out of bed and I'm checking my emails, texts and the headlines! It's terrible!" Culture tells us that if we're not up to date we're behind. What did I miss? Gotta check the news. We hurry to the next appointment. We wait for a reply to a text.

Jesus tells the disciples to wait for the divine power that will soon come to them. That power of the Holy Spirit – who is the promised one who can and will guide their every next step as the church. And so they were continually in the temple worshipping, waiting and praying! God was preparing their hearts for what was next.

Challenge one! This week – stop. Stop and worship and wait and pray! Before we check our phone, say a prayer of gratitude for the day. Before we check the morning news, grab a coffee and sit with a Bible verse. Before we make another quick decision, pause and pray. Ask for God's guidance in decisions large and small!

As it says in that beautiful text from Ephesians, we wait and pray so that God can give us a spirit of wisdom, and enlighten our hearts. We pray so that we might know the greatness of God's power that can be working in our lives if we tap into it! We pray so that God can give us hope! If we do nothing else, take the bulletin home and read Ephesians 1 every day this week!

It is in this way that we on earth inhabit life with Jesus who is in heaven. We think, "If only Jesus was here to talk to!" He is! And we are as well. Waiting, and worshipping and praying brings us into the Divine presence where the Lord of Heaven and Earth abides.

The second theme of Ascension Day that needs to be lifted up is this. The angel said to the men, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?*" Why are you standing around? Jesus left you the same way He will come back. So now is not the time to linger! You've got work to do!"

Jesus had been training the disciples to carry on the mission after He was gone. Now is that time. He says to the disciples and to us, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and all of Samaria."

The arc of Jesus life and mission now resides with us! You and I, we are to be salt and light to the world. We are to spread the good news of God's grace and mercy. In our baptismal calls, God entrusts us with continuing the work of Christ on earth and in heaven. Now is the time!

I was listening this week to another church speaker bemoaning the fact that church attendance across the board is declining. "People aren't coming. We don't have enough young families! Who knows if the church will be alive in 10 years?"

And I thought, "Shame on us. Shame on us for not following Jesus' directive to be witnesses. To tell the story! To welcome others as He did. To love others as He did whether it is inside the walls of a church or outside."

We cannot decide to be victims of decreased church attendance when we with and through the power of God's Holy Spirit, haven't done our part to be witnesses to all of Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.

At Wheaton College, Illinois, (a Christian, liberal arts school) a professor goes out once a month with college students to talk with people about Jesus on the streets of Chicago. This type of evangelism makes the students nervous, but it stretches them too. The small group of four, professor and students, pray before the evening begins. "We pray and tell the Lord we are available to speak with anyone the Holy Spirit is directing us to." And so they approach folks who are waiting for something or someone at train stations, or buses or on park benches.

About 50% turn them down when they ask if they can just talk to them about Jesus. But 50% don't! One night they had great conversations with a parent who realized he did need help in shaping his adolescent boys values. They spoke with a Jewish man who wasn't practicing the Orthodox religion of his childhood. Another woman had drifted from a faith and hearing again the assurance of God's love and forgiveness brought her great joy.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/october/evangelism-and-marketplace-four-stories-of-evangelism-on-st.html>)

I realize that for many of us, simply passing the peace is our own act of evangelism. Which is where Jesus gives us grace with larger concentric circles. “You’ll start in Jerusalem, then to Judea and then to all of Samaria!” Start with those you know and move out from there!

Second and final challenge. This week as we wait and worship and pray, ask God’s guidance for who needs to hear of God’s love? Who needs a message of grace? Who can I tell, you tell, we tell about Jesus?

Pray with me for the over 70 young children we’ll have a Vacation Bible School. For some of those children, it may be the first time they hear the story of God’s love. Pray with me the Holy Spirit will open their hearts.

It’s Ascension Day! May the Lord of Heaven and Earth bless us with praise and power and the courage to tell His story! Thanks be to God!  
Amen.