

**May 16, 2021**

Psalm 47

Acts 1:1-11

***“Untitled”***

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Our Second scripture reading comes from Acts 1:1-11.

*<sup>1</sup> In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

*<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

***The grass withers, the flower fades, the word of the Lord endures forever.***

There was a movie I loved as a child that was always full of suspense, surprises and happiness. Let me set the stage. We begin in the desert, or maybe it was a tundra, or maybe even a forest. In any case it was outside in the wilderness. As the video scans, there are no humans around, not even a road sign or a map of where we are. There’s some music playing in the background, but I won’t tell you what it is because no one needs to hear me sing. Then we see countless animals go by, elephants, birds of all kinds, even some lions. Some of you may know what movie I’m referring to, but for now we will keep it to ourselves. Then we reach the moment we have all been waiting for. A cute lion cub is held up for the entire animal kingdom to see and behold. He is the hope for the future of their kingdom, the glimpse of goodness and the child of a king. But what can go wrong, does go wrong, things you wouldn’t imagine happen, and yet somehow he makes a triumphant return. I’m not implying that young Simba is Jesus, but rather showing you a little of how the world learns and reinforces what we already know.

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Our text this morning is the opening chapter of Acts. However, it is not the beginning of the book. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, also known as Acts of the Apostles, make up one book separated into two volumes that was addressed to one person, Theophilus. Now we could go deep into this and try to discover who Theophilus is and why this is one book, but that's not our focus today. Instead I share some insights from scholars who have renamed both books based on what they narrate. The Gospel of Luke is viewed as the "acts of Jesus," while Acts can be more accurately called the "Acts of the Holy Spirit." Some believe Acts to be a sequel to Luke, yet it gives us insight into the life of the disciples immediately following the resurrection and ascension. In addition, Acts is seen as a bridge between the Gospels that precede it and the works that come after it.

This Sunday we are celebrating a joyous moment in the liturgical year, a moment that is often overlooked because it happens before Pentecost: The Ascension. The Ascension is the moment when Christ is lighted up to take his place in heaven with God. A moment that signifies the fulfillment of scripture. A moment so amazing that they cannot look away from what is happening.

But let's step back and take a look at this word ascension. This word only occurs in the Bible a handful of times and always refers to Christ. The ascension is an action and is describing Jesus being taken up or being received up, depending where you are. From our point of view, Jesus is being taken from this earth. However, God is receiving his son after he fulfilled a promise, a reunion. Although we are celebrating the joyous moment, there's a lot left to be discovered within this passage. So, what is happening with this passage we have before us?

We begin with time; time is very important. All throughout the text we find ourselves being reminded of time. [Jesus] appearing to them during forty days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?", "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority and lastly [Jesus] will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. Everyone is constantly interested in when things would happen.

We experience time in the past, present and future. What I found interesting in the midst of all of this, is that each segment of time marks a season. Now the word season is significant in my interpretation. A wise friend once said that we must prepare for the season before the season changes. Even Jesus is constantly reminding us of this as he attempts to prepare his disciples. Preparation is important because when you attempt to prepare for a season, when the season is here, it doesn't quite work. Like trying to buy a winter coat in winter. But, how do you prepare for a season before it changes? Well, Jesus lays out some of the preparation for us. Start with prayer. Praying every morning as the change comes, meeting God every morning before the season can prepare us for a bigger change. Remembering what we have been taught and the example set before us, Christ has shown us the way. And don't forget that every season has something good in it. Every season is good for something. Good still comes in the season even if we can't see it in that moment.

So what are these seasons? Well, forty days marked the season of Eastertide, when Jesus showed up to speak to them about the kingdom of God. In the same manner that he prepared them during the season of Lent, Jesus also prepared them during this time. And in both seasons it was still hard to believe what they were hearing and seeing. I would have hoped, after the first time Jesus came and left, that there would be less questions... but they are still curious. Next, the Holy Spirit and restoration of Israel mark a season without Christ, they have known for a long time that the Son of Man would not always be with them. Jesus says to them; "I am sending the Holy Spirit to be with you in my absence." And they, the disciples, would have to trust in the One who sent them to be what the world needed. Then



once again they are waiting for Christ to come. He leaves them with a glimpse of hope to look forward to. A hope that wasn't going to be immediate, but instead a mystery.

While I could go on and on and on about Jesus and all that the ascension means to us, but what now? Jesus defeated death and could have stayed on earth, yet he leaves again. We were barely prepared for the first time he told us that he would leave and, when he returns, they still needed convincing proof. So why would he go and what do we do? After he leaves, we are left with one question. What does it mean to be Christ's disciple? What does it mean to be a faithful follower of Christ?

This question is so important that people are constantly asked this when they are asked about their faith. We always go back to this same question at many different stages in life. This question is used within confirmation, "Will you be Christ's faithful disciple..." Asked during the ordination of Elders, Deacons, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament, "Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ..." So, what does it mean to be Christ's disciple? What does this look like for me? Well let's explore a few responses to that question.

First, it's a celebration of the Life of Christ. We celebrate the fulfillment of a prophecy and the hope of his triumphant return. God has always fulfilled promises, and even if it's not within your timeframe, it still happens. So, enjoy God and all that we know about Christ. God sending Christ into this world was a gift to us. A gift we have never truly understood but one worth celebrating. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that "I come so that you may have life and have it abundantly." We live, not just to survive in a changing world but to live with joy, love and so much more.

Second, we welcome the Holy Spirit. Not just a voice in the distance, but an active part of our lives. The Holy Spirit has always been a mystery to us, yet Jesus says "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Jesus claims us in our individual baptisms and in the same manner we are baptized again to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. In addition, I like to think it's a reminder to the disciples that they must wait to receive the Spirit and then they will be ready to witness, not only to the places they know like Jerusalem and Samaria, but also to the "ends of the earth."

Third, we embrace the connection between us and the divine. We still feel. We are connected emotionally. We are still convicted. Our hearts break for the things that Christ cares about. We care deeply for those in need, we walk with those fighting for justice, and we care for those experiencing a loss. We feel joy. We celebrate the reunion between God and Jesus. We celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit. We celebrate new life in the love of children, we celebrate new followers of Christ, and we aspire to love as God has. Without a deep connection to God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, something would be missing.

Fourth, we allow ourselves to be curious and open to the mysterious. There's still more to be discovered. The main part of understanding and discovering what it means to be Christ's disciple is continuous exploration, allowing curiosity to lead the way – also knowing that the role you play will be

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different from anyone else. We don't have the same path; we can't put ourselves in categories or mimic the life of someone else. This makes me excited because I will find my own way to reach the same conclusion as each of you by becoming a faithful follower of Christ. Curiosity is one of the greatest gifts because it allows us to be constantly surprised by new things, and intrigued by what we already know.

Here's the beauty in these words spoken today... Enjoy the life you live and celebrate the moments that make you come alive. Christ may have ascended to heaven to fulfill a promise, but he is forever connected to us when we let him into our lives. And when we encounter big questions, we can remember that they don't require big deep answers. Instead we get to reengage the small but profound questions: Who am I? What am I discovering? What do I need to rediscover? How do I open myself up to new discoveries?

The words of Christ inspire movement and curiosity, not a definitive plan. So, live into the process and welcome how things evolve and change over time. So remember this, as the seasons change, let curiosity be the driver, celebrate the joyous moments, and don't be afraid to ask yourself some questions.

Amen.

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