



Ascension of Our Lord
12 May 2024

You Are...

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen. When Luke writes his account of the story of Jesus, he spends a good amount of time tending the poor, the sick, and all who are in need of healing. The book of Colossians, in the New Testament, tells us that Luke was a physician and we believe a disciple of the Apostle Paul. When we read the book of Luke, we get caught up in the way that Luke presents the story of Jesus - the fulfillment of the promise God made to the people of Israel. Jesus is Christ, the Lord. He is the redeemer sent by God to declare God's salvation to all people. Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God has come near, heals those who are sick, raises some from the dead, casts out demons, restores to people a wholeness allowing them to participate in society, and teaches his followers through parables. Unlike the book of Mark which tells the whole story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in 16 chapters. Luke takes his time – drawing out the story of the Savior of the world for 24 chapters. I find it amusing that for all the healings, the miracles, the parables, the resurrections, and the restoration of people to the fullness of life – Luke, is quite content to tell the entire story of Jesus' resurrection, appearance to the disciples, and ascension into heaven in one tiny little chapter. It is almost as if Luke forgot to write down the story of Easter and the ascension into heaven and the editor sent it back for Luke to finish the story.

For Luke, the story ends in the village of Bethany on the Mount of Olives. This is where Jesus leads the disciples, lifts his hands in blessing, and then is taken up to heaven. But long before Jesus ascends into heaven, Bethany has been a safe haven for Jesus. In Bethany his feet are anointed with oil by the woman with the alabaster jar of perfume. In Bethany, he will visit the home of Mary and Martha and while Martha prepares the food for the guests, Mary will sit at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching. It will be Bethany where Jesus will prepare to enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It is Bethany where Jesus will stay at the home of Simon the Leper. And it is Bethany where Jesus will raise his friend Lazarus from the dead. Bethany, literally means, house of affliction. Is it any wonder that Luke, the physician, lifts-up the village by sharing the stories connecting Bethany to the ministry and presence of Jesus? Bethany is the place you go when you are broken. When you are afraid. When all else is lost, it seems Bethany can be your safe haven.

You do not visit Bethany for status or position. Bethany is the house you enter to find belonging. Bethany is the place where being broken, rejected, cast out is your welcome. Is it any wonder that Jesus finds a safe place to rest in Bethany? Among the poor, the sick, the leper – Jesus finds a welcome. In Bethany, the hoped-for future Kingdom of God comes near to Jesus. It is no surprise then that Jesus spends time in Bethany when he is near Jerusalem. And for Luke, Bethany is the place where the poor, the sick and the outcast are tended, embraced, loved – everything Luke tries to tell us to do in the first 23 chapters of his good news of Jesus.

“When I was with you before,” Jesus says, “I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. 46 And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer



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and die and rise from the dead on the third day. 47 It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ 48 You are witnesses of all these things.” And there is the final foot note Luke wants to leave with us – a reminder of why Jesus came, why Jesus died, why Jesus rose from the dead. ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ You are witnesses of all these things. It turns out Luke had the big picture of God’s saving power in mind all along. “You are witness of all these things,” Luke writes to remind us of the words of Jesus. In Isaiah 43, the prophet Isaiah speaks for God, “you are my witnesses.” In Acts chapter 1, “you will be my witnesses.” In 1 Thessalonians 2, “you are witnesses.” Do you get the idea? Luke wants to continue to tell the story of God’s promise. The faithful have seen the power of God at work for generations. You are witnesses of all these things. Matthew changes the wording a little – reminding us with the words, “you are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world.” Our witness to the power of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is our safe-haven, our Bethany, our place of belonging. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the poor, the rejected, the broken, the outcast find a welcome. We find forgiveness for our sins. And sometimes we find forgiveness for ourselves. For all the moments of this life we hold on to that weigh us down. We would call them regrets, mistakes, disappointments, shame. There is a welcome for us. There is forgiveness. But Luke is not done with us yet.

The gift Luke keeps giving is how he ends his last chapter of the life of Jesus. Luke records these words of Jesus. “And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. Not only do we find a welcome in Bethany as Jesus is lifted up into heaven. We also find one more word promise from Jesus himself. “Now I will send the Holy Spirit.” It sounds great, wonderful, exactly what we need. Except we get a little lost in figuring out who the Holy Spirit actually is and what the Holy Spirit actually does.

We wrapped up JOLT last Thursday with the third article of the Apostles’ Creed...I believe in the Holy Spirit. Well, it got very exciting. For a few students, the best they could do with the Holy Spirit, is that the Holy Spirit is Spooky. OH BOY! But then the Holy Spirit actually stepped in. And these junior high students showed up. (I mean consider the amazing pastors who teach them about this stuff.) One student wrote: The Holy Spirit is with us every day. OKAY! Another student wrote: the Holy Spirit helps me find my path. HELLO! Another student wrote: the Holy Spirit gives me hope. HALLELUJAH! One student wrote: The Holy Spirit helps me get closer to God and helps me do things that honor God. I AM DYING! I mean this is what pastors who teach confirmation dream about. Can I get an AMEN? And if that is not enough to bring you hope and a welcome in your Bethany homecoming this day. The Holy Spirit also tells us:

You are loved. “But God demonstrates God’s own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8



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You are chosen. “For we know brothers and sisters loved by God, that God has chosen you. 1 Thessalonians 1:4

You are forgiven. ‘I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 1 John 2:12

You are heard. Evening, morning, and noon I cry out in distress, and the Lord hears my voice. Psalm 55:17

You are understood. You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You understand my thoughts from afar. Psalm 139:1

You are made new. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here. 2 Corinthians 5:17

You are saved. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8

My friends, you are welcome this day. Welcome to Bethany. The place where Jesus finds a welcome. The place where Jesus welcomes all of us. The promised Holy Spirit moves among us. You are witnesses of these things. Don’t forget it! Thanks be to God! Amen.