

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 212, 214:5, 213, 216, 218:6
Lessons: Daniel 7: 9-14, Acts 1: 1-11, Luke 24: 44-53
Sermon Text: Luke 24:50-51.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

For 40 days after his Resurrection Jesus was still on earth, teaching, preaching and even performed at least one miracle as recorded in Scripture. Of course, when he ascended into heaven, we see another miracle.

On the day we remember Jesus' ascension into heaven, we look at what surrounded that day. Today we see that

JESUS LEAVES EARTH

- 1. He gives commands to his followers and**
- 2. He gives promises to his followers and then**
- 3. He leaves the earth and angels give instructions and a promise that he will come again.**

Look at the specific commands that Jesus gives to his disciples.

At the end of Mark's Gospel we read Jesus saying "*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.*" Mark 16:15 (NIV)

They are to "go". They are not to just sit around and do nothing. Immediately before he ascended he said to his disciples: "*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" Acts 1:8 (NIV) Perhaps this idea of going into the world is most obvious starting on Pentecost, when people – and they are identified as Jews – from 15 countries and regions in the world heard what Jesus Christ had done for them. Those people on Pentecost were visiting Jerusalem and returned to their own countries. The book of Acts is filled with disciples of Jesus going to different towns and cities to tell about Jesus Christ.

They are to go "*into all the world.*" Now that is a pretty big command. But there are people in our congregations who have gone into other countries – perhaps not specifically to preach the good news about Jesus Christ – but they have been there. And their lives and actions as Christians gave witness to Jesus Christ and what he had done for them.

They are to "*preach the good news to all creation.*" That "preaching" doesn't have to be standing up in a pulpit. Even I have heard our children tell others about the marvelous works of God. But the "good news" is needed in all the world, by all human beings, in all of creation.

The church – and that includes every one of you – has properly been given the task of especially preparing men and women for what happens or will happen after death. How many people have died without ever hearing what Jesus did for them? The church – and that is Christians, all Christians – is to preach, proclaim, tell about, teach. Our calling as Christians is to preach the Gospel.

Unfortunately for the truth of the Gospel, churches have gotten involved in things that almost exclusively deal with matters of this world: poverty, equity, rights of people, earthly "justice". While some of these things that churches have gotten involved with are certainly good causes, they are often done at the expense of the message of Jesus Christ and the pure gospel. Satan must love that!

And what is the message? The message, the gospel is the news that Jesus Christ has paid the price God demanded for all your sins. He redeemed you, bought you back, won you back from the power of Satan and the eternal damnation that he, Satan, and every one of his followers deserve and will receive in hell.

This is the “gospel”, “the good news” that God wants to give to all men, so that believing it, they may be rescued, saved from eternal damnation by faith. And we are Christ’s ambassadors, given the command to represent and teach the truth of God in the world.

The commands Jesus gives to his church – to us – include the words found in Matthew 28. We, his church, believers, Christians, are to go and teach all nations, to **“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

No one is to be excluded from hearing that Gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice that he commands baptism. Scripture even includes starting with infants, who are to be baptized. We baptize infants to work faith in them and to bring them into Christ’s church. But our making disciples and teaching infants doesn’t stop at their baptism. It continues when we teach them the truth from God’s Word, the Bible.

Notice, too, that we aren’t to pick and choose what we want to teach them from the Bible. We are to be **“teaching them to obey everything [Christ has] commanded.”**

But Jesus also gives promises before he ascends into heaven. He tells us at the end of Matthew’s Gospel: **“lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”** Matthew 28:20 (KJV) “Surely” he tells us, he is with his believers until the end of the world. And then, of course, believers will be with him in heaven.

Some pretty terrible things are happening on earth right now. You don’t have to listen to much news at all to know how terrible things are on earth. Humans are killing humans. Humans are slandering humans. Humans are coveting and stealing the possessions of humans. Need I go on? Every day there is some more wickedness to be reported, some more hatred to be reported, some more cruelty to be reported. But your Savior has promised he will be with you even until the end of the world.

No matter what happens in the world, no matter what happens to you, your Savior will be with you. Do not turn your back on him. Do not refuse to listen to him!

He assures his disciples: **“I am going to send you what my Father has promised.** Luke 24:49 (NIV) That is the promise of the Holy Spirit to guide them, to teach them, to comfort them, to provide the very words they should write down for all men after their time on earth to read and hear. They will be **“clothed with power from on high.”** Luke 24:49 (NIV) That power includes the special gifts the Holy Ghost gave on Pentecost. Not only did the Holy Spirit give them the ability to tell about Jesus in foreign languages, he also gave them strength through prayer to go out to other cities and nations to tell people about Jesus Christ wherever they went.

Those promises are repeated in Acts chapter 1 when Jesus said: **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** Acts 1:8 (NIV)

These were not promises as men give, which may or may not be fulfilled. They were promises from the Son of God who loves you and gave himself for you so that you might live eternally!

The book of the Acts of the Apostles tells the history of how the Holy Spirit gave power to the disciples to go into the world with the Gospel. The journey of Jesus ended in Jerusalem. The mission of the church will begin in Jerusalem and finally reach to the ends of the earth, just as it has today!

And then Jesus leaves them. After he gave them final instructions, **“he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”** Acts 1:9 (NIV) **“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.”** Luke 24:50-51 (NIV)

Pastors at the end of our worship service lift up their hands and bless you. That is reminiscent of Jesus doing the same thing.

Did they expect him to be taken up into the sky? He went. He left them, but he did not leave them comfortless. His promise of the special coming of the Holy Spirit was with them.

When they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, on Pentecost, just 10 days later, they would receive power from that Holy Spirit, the third person of the Triune God.

So he is gone. They can’t see him anymore.

They have to be reminded with a message from angels! **“They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do**

you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1:10-11 (NIV)

With these words the angels remind him of what Jesus had just told them, and restate Jesus’ promises.

Then they didn’t just disperse and go their own ways.

We read in Acts that they returned to Jerusalem and selected a man to replace Judas Iscariot as an apostle.

We read in Luke’s Gospel that *“Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.”* Luke 24:52-53 (NIV)

Isn’t that a rather different picture than we present after church? How often don’t we just up and leave! They were “continually” praising God together, in a place reserved for worship!

The book of Acts also reports many of the things that the followers of Jesus did in the days and weeks and months and years following his ascension into heaven.

Satan was certainly at work among them, but with prayer and encouraging and admonishing and teaching one another they strengthened one another.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews speaks of the kinds of things we, too, can do to encourage one another:

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:19-25 (NIV)

Yes, Judgment Day is approaching quickly and we don’t know when it will come. But Jesus will come in the heavens again, to judge the living and the dead, as we read in Matthew: Listen to Jesus’ very words: *“the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”* Matthew 24:30-31 (NIV)

Yes, he is coming in the heavens again, just as he was taken up to heaven. We joyfully await that day. The very last words of the Bible assure us: *“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”* Revelation 22:20-21 (NIV)