

Acts 1:1-11

Ascension Day; May 14, 2015

Okay, so now what?

I had just gotten my learning permit for driving. I had been through the classes. I couldn't wait for finally getting on the road. I could now drive a car. I backed the big old car out of the driveway and began to drive a car down the road that we lived on. Then I looked in the rear view mirror. A car was now coming up from behind faster than I was driving. There was then a little bit of panic in my mind.... Okay, so now what? Do I go faster? Do I get out of his way? Do I pull off the shoulder or keep going? Ok, so now what?

Perhaps, that's a bit how the disciples felt in our text. They were still expecting Jesus to do something soon. They thought that everything they had seen him do was in preparation for him restoring worldly power to Israel. It seemed to them that this should be the time for Jesus to give the order. But Jesus had prepared them for something else

Jesus had prepared his disciples for his leaving. For 40 days after his Resurrection, he continued to instruct them. He was instructing them about many of the same truth that he had been teaching for the past 3 years. But now those truths took on new meaning in the light of His Resurrection. Luke writes in our text: **"After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."** Jesus wanted his disciples to know beyond any shadow of a doubt that he was alive. His mission was accomplished. When he cried out on the cross, **"It is Finished!"**, he had made payment for sin. The salvation that this world had been waiting for since the Garden of Eden was now done. The world was saved; now it must be won. It was now time for the disciples to carry on Jesus' work.

Now that they had been prepared, Jesus also commissioned them. . It was now time to send them on their mission. **"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** That's a pretty big job, isn't it? Perhaps the thought going through the disciples' minds at that time was: *"How are we going to do that?"* But Jesus doesn't just leave them to do that alone. He promises to give them the tools that they needed to get the job done.

He promises to send them the Holy Spirit. **"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."** His command to remain in Jerusalem was also a command to wait to be properly equipped for their future roles. The Holy Spirit would do the equipping. They would be able to speak in languages they had never learned before so that the Gospel could be preached to many more people. He would give them the gift of understanding God's Word to a much greater degree. No longer would they be waiting for a ruler to re-establish an earthly kingdom. They would be proclaiming a kingdom that would never end in Jesus. The Holy Spirit would be their counselor, their teacher of truth, their guide, and their source of power.

They would carry the message of Jesus to the world. According to tradition, Matthew died in Ethiopia. Andrew died in Greece. Thomas made it to India. Philip may have made it to North Africa. James may have been in Syria. Other Apostles were also witnesses in other parts of the world. They did exactly what Jesus had commissioned them to do.

He also commissions each of here this evening to be his witnesses. Like the disciples, he gives us the tools we need. We have the Word of God and the Sacrament of Baptism through which the Holy Spirit works. We work together to support the mission work of our church. We share Jesus' love with our families and our neighbors. We are his witnesses.

When you may travel for vacation, there is comfort to know that at the end of a long day's journey you have a room waiting for you. This comfort God gives to you tonight as we celebrate the ascension of Jesus. When your journey of life is finished, God has a room waiting for you in the mansions of heaven. There's no need to worry about the price. There's no anxiety about whether or not there will be room. The room is paid for with Jesus' blood and sacrifice. He is reserving it with your name on it.

On Ascension Day, let us also remember Christ's promise that He will return. Jesus is sitting at the right-hand of God at the present time. Mark writes in his Gospel: **"After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God."** (Mark 16:19) Jesus is now at the "right hand" of God exercising all the power that is his. He is ruling over all things for his believers. He has promised that he will return. Jesus had promised his disciples and us: **"And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** The disciples are reminded of that promise by two angels in our text: **"Men of Galilee, 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."**

Over the years, I have mostly gotten pass the *'ok, so now what?'* in driving. I've driven in cities like New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Washington D.C. and others. It always seems to be rush hour when hitting them. It doesn't mean that I don't blame my wife yet, when I get turned around. But driving is easier than when I was 15 years old.

The next time that you think to yourself: *"Ok, so now what?"* remember your ascended Lord. The next time that you feel yourself alone, remember that you aren't. You have a Lord that will walk with you every step of your life. Without Him, there is nothing that you can handle in this world. With Him, he handles everything for us. Let's lift our eyes to heaven, and see a Lord who will return and take us home someday. Amen.