

Ephesians 1:15-23

Ascension/Confirmation

I wonder how many times that little group of men thought back to that day. The day when they stood on the Mount of Olives. From there they could see the city of Jerusalem laid out below them. From there they could see the Garden of Gethsemane, the area of the Upper Room, Caiaphas' palace. But most importantly they could see Mount Calvary and the empty tomb. Luke writes in our Gospel Lesson: **"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.'**" For one last time, Jesus walks them through all that he had come to do in each of those places.

Why? For the disciples, life was about to get more challenging. After all, this was a pretty big task that Jesus was giving them. How are they going to do that? How would you feel if I told the Confirmands (you) that you are going to go and tell the world, all nations, about Jesus? If we are honest, that would be pretty overwhelming. On top of that people would be beaten. Some would die a martyr's death. People were going to be tossed in prison. Yet, it wasn't just other people that this would happen to. It would happen to them as well.

It wouldn't just be other people, who would suffer, it would also happen to them. They were going to find out what it meant to be Jesus' disciples. I imagine that those men would like back to the day that Jesus **"opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."** Then Jesus would lift up his arms and bless them as he ascended into heaven. There they would see Jesus for the last time.

Last sights can be powerful moments, can't they? If you have ever sat at the bedside of a mother or father as they are dying, you know how long you will remember that last squeeze of their hand. When someone speaks to you their last words before they die, you remember those words. When a national tragedy like 9/11 happens, you remember where you were and what you were doing. Jesus wanted his little group of disciples to remember his last words. He wanted them to see that they had nothing to fear. He wanted them to remember that he wasn't just leaving them, he was going back to heaven to take his seat on the throne of God. Paul writes in our text: **"That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."**

He wants you to remember that as well. Jesus is sitting on his throne. He is ruling the world for YOU. The Confirmands (You) are making a pretty big promise today. They (you) are promising to be faithful to God for the rest of your life. That's a promise that many around you have already made. There is no way that you are going to be able to keep that promise on your own. I'll guaranty that you won't be able to do it by yourself. That's why we pray the same prayer that Paul prayed in our text: **"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."** We are praying for each one of them (you) today. Your God wants you to know that he is ruling earth and heaven for you.

When the disciples were feeling weak, how valuable it would be for them to see the risen Jesus powerfully rise up off to the sky! When they would feel alone, how valuable to see the cloud covering Jesus, reminding them that Jesus hadn't really left. What a powerful reminder this sight gave the disciples. Yes, he was saying good-bye, but he wasn't saying that he was going to leave them alone.

I mentioned this at a funeral on Friday, but I think the thought applies here just as much. Did you know where the term *"good-bye"* came from? *"Good-bye"* is a contraction of the phrase *"God be with ye."* (I didn't know that

either until a few days ago.) Depending on the source, it seems to have popped up somewhere between 1565 and 1575. As time went on, it is believed that the phrase was influenced by terms like “good day” and “good evening”, transitioning then from “God be with ye” to finally ending in today’s word of “good-bye.” Kind of neat, isn’t it? It kind of changes the whole perspective of the word “good-bye.” As you say “good-bye,” you are really saying “God be with you.” It would be that thought that would cause a pastor by the name of Jeremiah Rankin to write the words of the hymn: “God be with you till we meet again. It puts a whole different perspective on saying “good-by” to someone, doesn’t it? That means that when we say “good-bye” to someone, we are saying “God be with ye.” That is our prayer for our Confirmands today. *God be with you* as you carry out the promises that you are making today.

All of this ruling “**over everything for the church,**” is all possible through the cross. What else were the last things that those disciples saw as they watched him rise? They saw the nail marks on his hands and his feet. It is those nail holes in his hands and feet that shows us that our sins are forgiven, in full, completely. So, today, we close with the same words that closes the Bible: “**The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.**”