

## **"Losing Jesus"**

**Day of Ascension/Easter 7 – May 10 & 13, 2018 – Lk 24:44-52; Acts 1:1-11**

**Put yourself in the disciples' shoes and try to imagine:** your life had been forever changed by a wandering rabbi from Nazareth. You'd given up everything of value that you had, and followed him. Then, the unthinkable. The worst thing that ever happened to you happened, and then been reversed, undone. Jesus – who they had lost forever on the cross – returned to be in their midst. By the 40<sup>th</sup> day, life was just getting back to normal. Then they lost him all over again.

We have all experienced those *growing up* kinds of times. Might have been the death of a parent, or the birth of child; or graduation, marriage, any of those HUGE life-changers that caused us to step up and get ahold of a whole new life. Once Jesus left, the lessons ended, and the work he left behind ***began***.

**Today, we are poised for Pentecost Sunday**, the 50<sup>th</sup> and final day of the Easter season, often known as the "birthday of the church." But ***Ascension***, the 40<sup>th</sup> day in Easter - is the true first day of Christ's church. Just as 40 days of rain on Noah and his family baptized the earth into a new life; just as 40 years in the wilderness changed the Chosen People of Israel; just as 40 days in the desert gave Jesus his agenda, 40 days of Easter helps us be intentional about allowing our lives to shine the light of the Easter PROMISE to all – 40 days to prepare our message, and our lives...

Author Peter Gomes says that Ascension has a two-way vision. In Acts, it's an UP ARROW as Jesus ascends to heaven. He leads the way to our *graduation into eternal life*. This is the promise of the cross, also known as ***Salvation***. But in Luke's Gospel, Ascension is a DOWN ARROW – a vision rooted firmly in THIS life – how God comes down to give us the *curriculum* for holy living, which we know as ***Sanctification***. We need BOTH - the goal of heaven and journey of discipleship - to feed us as we experience our own "ups & downs" in this life.

Even the angels (messengers of God) had different tasks and different ways to share. Where Easter's Guardian Angels ask, "*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*" Ascension's Directional Angels ask, "*Why are you looking up into heaven?*" Both as if to say, *That is NOT where you should be looking!* On Easter, "*You should be going to Galilee to meet him.*" At Ascension, "*Go and wait in the city until you receive power from on high*". Ascension helps us understand why it takes all seven weeks (49 days plus one) of Easter for us to stop gazing UP into heaven for Answers that have already been given, for directions we already have, to start using what has come DOWN to power our lives.

**Last Sunday we talked about God's unique relationship to you**, and that we each have a unique *Gospel of Jesus Christ according to you*. Whether you came to faith by gazing up into heaven, your heart filled with awe at the beauty of Creation, or whether you believe because *The Bible Tells Me So*, along with faithful mothers and Grammas, and your youth pastor and your Sunday School teachers, etc. etc. Not being connected to God the way we'd like is like watching Jesus go home to God. Like losing Jesus. But we have a God who knows how it ALL feels, the pain and loneliness as well as the joy of companionship. And we have the history of all the saints before us who knew what that was like, and stepped up and carried their unique witness throughout the ages until today. Mixed emotions. The juxtaposition of the Up Arrow and Down Arrow. The head/heart - saint/sinner dialectic we Lutherans know so well.

**Yes, Jesus left us. And he left us with a job to do.** But Jesus also left us with the power and authority to do it. So, when Jesus said *I will come again*, did he mean through us? Did disciples

feel that they had lost Jesus, that he had left them? Or did they trust that they were not abandoned? For the Holy Spirit did come down, and now we are the disciples...

We have met Jesus in the Sacraments, caught a glimpse of his life and teaching through the witness of the Bible, and spoken to him from our deepest heart in prayer. Now, **we come down** into the sin and cruelty of the world to tell people that forgiveness and restoration are available to them. That we know a God who creates, does not break; who sustains, does not harm; who reveals, does not hide.

You know, defining Advent Lutheran Church's mission is more difficult than you might think. We are stable and safe and relatively secure in the lives we think we have made for ourselves. But make no mistake, there is work to be done for everyone you know: it might not be homeless, hungry, naked or captive - but it very well could be a parent who yearns for meaning, a teen who is lost and cannot find their way; drugs that are too available, relationships that are broken, the privileged who have no hope.

**Yes, Jesus left us behind.** His work here was finished, and our lives are changed so that God's work goes on through us. And what an honor and a privilege to be the ones he has chosen to point to him, to bring him to the table and feed the hungry, to call upon him for comfort and healing and justice, and to be him when loving arms are needed. We must not be distracted. The work we have to do is not for the **faint**-hearted, it's for the **faith**-hearted.

But first you have to figure out how God has touched your heart, your head, and your life. Then, you will know how to proceed, to bring God in Christ's body, the church. Your life has changed, people of God. Time to step up, for the healing of the world. **Amen.**

Pastor Susan Langhauser  
Advent Lutheran Church, Olathe, KS  
Ascension/Easter 7 -- May 13, 2018

Resources: Juan Carlos Huertas/*Day One*; Osvaldo Vena/*Working Preacher*; Peter Gomes/"On Ascension"