

Sermon- Our Savior's Lutheran Church- Ascension Sunday- 6/2/2019
Text- Luke 24:44-53

Up, Up and Away

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. It's been a wild and crazy (using Steve Martin terminology) few weeks in the lives of the disciples. It all started on Palm Sunday with the jubilant march into Jerusalem. Then, total dismay on Good Friday, followed by confusion on Easter Sunday. What happened to Jesus? Then they had Jesus appearing to them on at least three occasions. They felt up again.

And then today Jesus ascending into heaven. What a period of weeks. Up/Down, Up/Down. We can relate. We have those same periods of up/down, up/down. Wouldn't it be nice to always have the Up moments? Maybe that's why wise old Uncle Abe, (Uncle of my Jewish friend growing up) used to say, over and over - Mann Tracht und Gott Lacht – Man plans and God laughs.

What does this Ascension text mean for you and me? It's rather a simple text. Jesus was lifted up and a cloud took him out of the disciple's sight. Even after Jesus had disappeared, the disciples kept gazing up toward heaven, until suddenly two men in white robes asked them, "You, Galileans, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" Kind of a silly question, after all, you and I would be looking up as well.

But, to understand the power of the Ascension we have to go back to what Jesus had said previously. It came when the disciples had asked Jesus a question. "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus told them to forget about the time but instead focus on this - "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." Surely he meant here at Our Savior's as well.

Years ago I saw a wonderful picture of Jesus' Ascension. It was a black and white woodcut, showing Jesus going up into the clouds. But if you looked closely at the picture you would notice footprints on the ground. Maybe the artist was reminding us that Jesus is with us. His footprints are all around us.

Can we see the footprints in the wilderness?

Can we see the footprints of Jesus walking on the wrong side of the street with the wrong people?

Can we see the footprints of Jesus going to a Sycamore tree inviting Zachaeus and us?

Can you see the footprints of Jesus stumbling toward Golgotha?

We don't celebrate the Ascension because it's 40-something days after Easter and that's what we are supposed to do. We don't celebrate the Ascension because it's in the Apostles Creed. We celebrate the Ascension because we're no different from the early church who gathered around this story from the beginning to hear what they needed: the news that they were going to receive power. And perhaps more importantly, we celebrate this day to be reminded that we have no power of our own and never have. The only power we have comes from the Holy Spirit.

Ascension Day is the day to remember that's it's the Spirit at work in us and the church that makes all manner of impossible things possible - things a good deal more mystifying than Jesus rising into the air.

Things like the woman who knew she couldn't face it when her husband became critically and terminally ill, who woke each morning for months wanting to fall apart and disappear. But she didn't. She survived and met what came each day. And not only that, when she looks back, she knows she didn't do it alone because facing her husband's death was not something she could possibly have done.

By the power of the Spirit of God, a man who had been addicted to alcohol for more than half his years stopped drinking and stayed sober. When people asked how he did it, the first thing he says is he didn't. Something else helped him!

The Spirit that anointed Jesus now anoints you and me. That's what Jesus tried to tell his disciples before he left them. "You will receive power from the Holy Spirit, everywhere you live and breathe, on this earth where I leave my footprints."

We can stand looking up into heaven or we can believe the promise of Jesus. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." And you will be my witnesses. You will make footprints in and through ordinary, imperfect communities of faith that seldom get it right.

Ascension Day is not a day to look up. It is to trust that Christ's promise is down and around us. We are not alone -you and I who dance and climb, who run and get knocked down, we who lie on the grass or sit watching the late-night news. We are not alone.

You see, the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, surprises us at every turn, saying, "Guess who?"

Amen. Let it be so.