**Luke 24:44-53 May 24, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning, as we observe Ascension Day, comes from the Gospel of Luke the 24th chapter, here re-reading these words. “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

You can imagine the anger, the frustration, the sadness, and the pain that would come from this scene. You have been waiting in line patiently all day to meet a particular celebrity, or to receive a specific item that you’ve wanted and that’s in such short supply you won’t be able to get it again. You have waited, and waited, and gotten closer and closer. Finally, you are the next in line and you can see the door that you’ll walk through to meet the person, or to make the purchase. You can see a shadow of the person, or you can see the table with the item even, or catch a glimpse as the door opens and closes after others have come and gone. But then a manager comes forward and informs the line, time’s up. The store is closing, the opportunity is gone. The person has left, the items have run out, it’s over. You were that close! But it’s too late.

It was this last Thursday that the church celebrates the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This morning we are observing the Ascension of our Lord, and this is the final Sunday of the Easter season. This is it. Time’s up. It’s over. We are blessed by God to be able to meet in person next week, and are excited to come together as brothers and sisters in Christ in worship in God’s house for the festival of Pentecost, even if it will be in a very drastic and different way than we are used to. But the truth is, when it comes to the Easter season, when it comes to this high point in the Church Year, we weren’t able to be together. Not for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, or even ANY OTHER SUNDAY IN THE ENTIRE SEASON! And now, we are coming back, but it’s too late for Easter. The white will be gone, the banners will come down, the red of Pentecost soon will be overtaken by the green of the summer months here in the church year, as we observe the Sundays after Pentecost. We were that close, but now it’s too late.

This year was obviously different, but that doesn’t mean that there weren’t any benefits to our Easter season away from each other. It’s tempting to think that once we have a vaccine in place that things will just go back to the way they were before this virus hit, but that thinking would be foolish. Things will never be exactly the same as they were before. We’ve all been changed. Big events in life, change you, change your perspective, change your habits, change the way you are. I’m not here to say that the events of these past few months have been “normal” but I am simply saying that losing this time together, should change us. It should make us appreciative of every Easter season that we get to celebrate together in the future. It should make us appreciative and thankful for anytime we are able to worship in God’s house again. Big events, change you.

It was that way for the disciples of Jesus Christ. There was no going back to their lives before Christ. They get back in the boat and do some fishing, but soon Jesus appears and reroutes them to their true calling and purpose in a post resurrection world. They are witnesses of the amazing life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These too were not normal events; they weren’t things that could just be forgotten. These were life changing events, and now as witnesses of this they would go and witness to the world of the love of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Beginning from Jerusalem, staying in the city until they were clothed with power from on high. Ascension is the moment, when Christ ascends up into the clouds, when he leaves this world of sin and sadness to prepare a place for all of us, His beloved children. He leaves in physical body as the disciples had known him and experienced him, but he does not leave them or abandon them anymore than he would have abandoned us. He is present in the knowledge that he imparts to them, opening their minds to understand the Scriptures and how he is the fulfillment of the Messianic promise, how he is the very subject of the entire book. He is present in His word, He is present in His Sacraments, he remains with us.

There is no going back for the disciples, to a life lived before the monumental events that had taken place. There is no going back for us, to a pre-Covid world, and there is no going back for us, from the Easter joy that we still experience, even if we aren’t able to meet together in person. You can’t go back, not after what has happened, not after Jesus Christ has come to this earth to die and rise again to save you from your sin. You can’t just go back to that sin! You can’t! It makes no sense! Yet you do. And I as well. We shouldn’t, we know we shouldn’t, we try and fight it, but we succumb. Due to the loneliness, the isolation, the anger and frustration of a world that continues to pile on regulations for safety, a world that seems to not be getting any better, a world of floods, devastation, and despair. We give in, willingly, in weak moments, and we sin. And we try to go back to lives that weren’t transformed by the work of Jesus Christ. We try to hide away from God in our homes and flee from him. After all, he’s gone. He doesn’t see what we do. He doesn’t know what we do. He may not even care what we do. He’s gone. Why does it even matter? We just want things to go back to normal, to the way they were when we can do what we want.

It’s how the disciples could have behaved. Their lives were threatened for being disciples of Jesus Christ. They could just blend back into the crowd, flee from Jerusalem, never go near the temple again, or even a local synagogue. Never say the word Jesus again, and just live out the rest of their lives in private protection. And yet Luke records that after Jesus has parted from them and gone into heaven. They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continuously in the temple blessing God. Their lives had been transformed. There was no going back. And rather than living in a state of despair because Jesus was gone from them physically, they connected and heard His voice through the Scriptures. They were overjoyed to still be in His presence in His house.

Every Sunday is a mini-Easter for us. Whether it’s in your home seeing me saying these words or reading them on a computer screen. The Easter season may end, but look around our sanctuary the next time you’re here. You’ll see Easter everywhere. From the side windows, to the main stained glass display, to the very cross behind me. The cross, a reminder of his suffering and death, but the light that radiates behind it, reminds us of the empty tomb and his glorious resurrection. Easter is everywhere in God’s house, nothing can take that away. Your joy can’t be diminished from an unprecedented time. Instead, let these past months, change you for the better. To recognize the pain of not being able to be together for these holy days, and be appreciative of when we can be together again. Easter has changed all of us, and don’t let sin and guilt lead you to despair, or to think that you aren’t welcome here. God’s love is for all because God sent His Son to die for all not out of obligation, but out of love. I can’t wait to see you again. I can’t wait to worship together, even if it’s different, even if it’s strange and takes time to get used to. I look forward to being with you again in worship. And we all should look forward to being with Jesus, physically present, when He returns just as he left to take us to be with Him. God bless and keep you safe in His love, and in the joy of Easter, long after this season has come to an end.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.