**Luke 24:44-53 May 29, 2022**

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

 Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Luke the 24th chapter here re-reading these words. “Then he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

 The end. Jesus has been lifted up, as we sang together up through endless ranks of angels, his true triumphant entry not this time into Jerusalem on a donkey in humility but back to his true heavenly kingdom to be seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He’s gone. As Paul writes, He is “seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.” The Easter season is over. This is the final Sunday. It’s hard to believe that if we weren’t observing Christ’s Ascension this Sunday this would be the 7th Sunday of Easter. The 7th Sunday of celebration! But like a wedding reception that has gone on past Midnight, past 2 a.m. or 3 a.m., it’s time to wrap it up. It’s over. It’s done. Time to move on. Like how Graduations happen at this time of year and the school year as well comes to an end. It’s time to move on. This time of year brings season finales for our favorite shows, the end of sports seasons, the culmination of regular, school year, spring routines and a time for something new. This time of year is full of this emphasis. Sunday School has ended and Bible Class will be done today. It’s over. It’s done. The end.

 Or is it? Ascension Day may seem like the epilogue of the story of Jesus Christ, but is this really the bookend of Jesus Ministry? Or just the beginning? The honest answer is that this was the start of a new chapter in the lives of the disciples, and in the proclamation of the Gospel. From Christmas to Ascension, and even after as next week we celebrate Pentecost and then Holy Trinity Sunday, we celebrate in the Festival season of the Church Year. We look at Christ’s birth, life, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension. It may seem that’s the whole story, and this is simply the end. But to assume that would mean that this is the time of the year where nothing happens, which is false. Something always happens, the Word of God is an inspired document, the reading of the Word strengthens the faith in our hearts, the Word is where we learn and hear the very Words of God, so we should never discount the time we spend in study, in meditation, in receiving from God the gifts He so freely and lovingly gives to us.

 The Ascension of our Lord is a teaching moment, it isn’t the end, it’s a time to open our eyes to just how blessed we are as his people. For Jesus doesn’t ascend in retreat, He ascends in triumph. He doesn’t abandon us to save his own skin, he equips and provides for the church on earth all that it needs and leaves to prepare a place for that beloved church, his beloved children, in his true heavenly kingdom. Jesus is always giving blessings, and His Ascension is no different. He blesses the disciples with opening their minds to understand the Scriptures, and focus all of us on the most important message to take out to the world. “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” A blessing, a focus, a moment of seeing what is truly important, which is the death and resurrection of our Savior, and then a recognition of how we are joined to Christ, which is through repentance and forgiveness of our sins. Jesus lays that out clearly at His Ascension, which means that these words point to how this isn’t the end of the proclamation of the Gospel, it’s the beginning.

 It’s the start, the Spirit will go out and work in the hearts of men and women all throughout Jerusalem and all throughout the world, and the Spirit still works today! Sometimes we read the Bible as a story that was told, with an ending, but we couldn’t be more wrong. The story continues, Ascension isn’t the end, because Jesus is still working in the midst of His Word and in His Church today. You are part of the story, the story of faith, the story of the Gospel, the story that continues throughout history of how the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and how repentance and forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed in his name even to this nation today. The message didn’t change, it remains the same. As Peter says in Acts chapter 4 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Next week we will hear about the Spirit going out to the nations, and how in miraculous fashion the church grew through the Gospel being proclaimed in various languages.

 That is, we will hear about it, if we are here. If we are plugged in to the Gospel, if we are faithful stewards of our time and of this gift that has been given to us, by the men who witnessed Christ’s ministry first hand. But like we already talked about….this is a unique time of the year… it’s the end of May. There are graduations, there are vacations, there is a lot of fun to be had out on that lake, simply put there are other things to attend to. And come on Pastor, it’s the 7th Sunday of Easter. Don’t we get a break? When is the off season? It’s in our sinful nature to yearn for easier and more comfortable days, when we don’t have to worry about the strengthening of our faith, where we don’t have to worry about the forgiveness of our sins or even sin at all and we can just do what we want to do. Ascension Day then changes meaning, no longer is this the triumphant return of God’s Own Son to be seated in glory, and the example of the disciples glorifying God and worshipping in the temple. The disciples going out and spreading the Gospel, and facing persecution and death, not letting prison or physical harm stop them from the charge and responsibility they were given. No, instead Ascension Day for us is an excuse, like so many other times in our lives, to do less, or do nothing. Like when the Teacher leaves the room, and gives the class an assignment, only to see when they return that the students have been goofing off. Or when a boss is gone for a few days, and gives instructions, but everyone takes it as an opportunity to show up late and leave early. Or when a parent leaves and that means you don’t have to clean up after yourself or go about the chores that need to be done, instead you see it as an excuse to do whatever you want. The list goes on and on. We give less when we feel that the watchful eye isn’t on us, and we are all guilty of sloth and laziness. Especially when we feel that we deserve a break.

 But this isn’t the time of the Church Year where nothing is offered, the offseason so to speak. The greatest lesson to learn when it comes to Christ’s Ascension, is that just because He has gone to heaven, it doesn’t mean in His omniscience that he doesn’t know the true intentions of your heart. That he doesn’t see your actions and your sin, and that he won’t one day return in judgment of all that you’ve done. Ascension Day is a celebration of the fact that Jesus sits in triumph and authority, but hear again these words of Paul, “He is seated far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” He is above all names, all powers, all authorities, which includes you, which includes me, which includes the world. We don’t make the rules, we don’t call the shots. We don’t get to take a break when we feel like it, for the only true moment of rest will come in the eternal place of rest. Until then we struggle, we fight, fight against our sinful flesh, fight against a world full of sin, fight against a creation that doesn’t want to see us flourish and thrive. We fight against each other, we fight against our culture, we fight against the norm of the world which is constantly telling you to take a break and only do what makes you happy. We fight, not alone, but as God’s redeemed and forgiven children. We fight not to save ourselves or earn salvation, but we fight in thankfulness for the very words that Jesus spoke before he blessed the disciples and left this world of sorrow. “The Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.” It’s what we’ve been singing about, what we’ve been hearing about in the lessons, what we’ve been seeing before our eyes in the decorations of this sanctuary that will soon be taken down. Christ did suffer. Remember the black? It was so long ago but I’m sure you can think of the sorrow of Christ suffering and dying for you on Good Friday. And on the third day he did rise from the dead! Christ has been raised from the dead! Give thanks to God, we still celebrate that long after the cross, and the decorations and the white is gone.

 So it’s not done. It’s not over. Things in our lives may come and go, school may be out, vacation time will come and we should take opportunities to find earthly rest. But don’t give in to the temptation that it’s all over and we hang up our church clothes till August. We have a lot to learn, we have a lot to celebrate! The story continues, and you’re part of it. So give thanks to the Lord, for your sins are forgiven, for the very Son of God came, died, rose, and ascended back into heaven for you. To prepare a place for you, and he will take you to be with Him. Then you can say with confidence that your earthly life’s story has come to an end. Until then, serve the Lord with thankfulness and joy, all 365 days of the year.

Amen.

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

Amen.