

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer".

Ascension Day  
Acts 1:1-11 - Psalm 47 - Ephesians 1:15-23 - Luke 24:44-53  
By  
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Today we celebrate Ascension Day which was actually Thursday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, but since it is such an important day in our Christian life, we are celebrating it on Sunday so more of us can enjoy this joyous event. It is the day when the apostles witnessed Jesus being raised up to his Father in heaven. It is not the final act of Jesus, but the beginning of a new phase of his ongoing work, and is a prelude to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In the first lesson from Acts, we are told that Jesus "ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father.....you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." The apostles did not fully understand what Jesus meant when he said to them "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ...to the ends of the earth." Jesus was speaking to them of their personal transformation through the Holy Spirit. This would empower them to become his witnesses to all. It is only after Jesus leaves his life here on earth that his followers can carry on the mission that he began. The emphasis of the ascension recounted in Acts is that the Holy Spirit will be coming and this will be the beginning of a new community of faith established here on earth. This community has the responsibility that was bestowed upon them during The Great Commission in Matthew 28 where Jesus stated "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Pentecost is the day that they received the Holy Spirit and began their lives as Disciples of Christ to the world. From the moment of Jesus' ascension until Pentecost, there was rejoicing and celebration as preparation for receiving the Holy Spirit. We are to rejoice today as we again celebrate Christ's ascension to his Father in heaven where he is preparing a place for us.

In the Gospel reading from Luke today, the disciples were told that this is all part of a Divine Plan for the salvation of the world that can only be understood through the revelation of Jesus himself. He promises that the Father would give them the power he himself had received to do these things, and they were to stay in Jerusalem until they had been "clothed with power from on high". As Jesus departed from them and was raised up into heaven, he blessed them, and they did as he instructed them and joyfully returned to Jerusalem to worship together in eager anticipation. It is with that in mind that we today joyfully celebrate Christ's ascension, and we will continue to offer prayers of thanksgiving throughout this coming week. We are to celebrate and make ourselves ready to once again receive the Holy Spirit at the upcoming Pentecost celebration.

The Word of God was made flesh in our Lord Jesus Christ and dwelt among us. He taught his disciples and those in his community through his words and actions, demonstrating what it is to live out God's commandments. His knowledge, compassion, assistance, love, and forgiveness were given freely to all—even for those who so cruelly crucified him he prayed to God saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." The Resurrected Christ appeared to many of his followers over the forty days after his death. Physically affirming to those like Thomas who may have had their doubts that God has the power over all things. This includes the power over death. As Christ ascended into Heaven he assured his apostles that they would not be left alone, but that the Spirit would be in them and they were to continue his teachings to all the world.

We received the Holy Spirit at our Baptism. Next Sunday is Pentecost which is often a day when we baptize others into our Christian Community. At this time, we do not have any new members joining us, but it is important for us from time to time to refresh and renew ourselves spiritually. We, here at St. James, are encouraged to wear red next Sunday in celebration, and we will be offering a time in our service when those of us who wish to renew our baptismal vows can do so. You may wish to join us around the Font or choose to remain in your pews, whatever you are comfortable with. Many of us were baptized as infants, and still others of us find that as we flow through various stages of our lives these vows are heard differently and various portions of it have a more poignant meaning to us. This is when you will hear the words

- ❖ "Fill them with your holy and life-giving Spirit...
- ❖ Teach them to love others in the power of the Spirit...
- ❖ You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever."

This is what the disciples were celebrating and eagerly waiting for. It is the beginning of our life as Disciples of Christ. Christ has ascended to the Father and is sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in each of us so that we can continue his teachings. It is through Jesus Christ that the whole world is invited into God's Kingdom. As Karl Rahner said, "The Ascension is a festival of the future of the world. The flesh is redeemed and glorified, for the Lord is risen forever." I pray that we can all here at St. James go forth and joyfully celebrate our risen Lord.