

Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This’, he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, **but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now.’

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But 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.’

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

Sermon

This Sunday marks the last day of our Easter Season, and the scripture we've read this morning shifts our focus away from Jesus' bodily work in this world and toward the gift that he shared with us all in the Holy Spirit. Next week, we celebrate Pentecost, so don't forget to wear your red pajamas as you worship God from home! But, I think this Sunday's text is perfect for this day of transition from one season of our church calendar to the next.

The book of Acts begins with an account of Jesus leaving the earth. Forty days after his resurrection, he is lifted up into the heavens to sit beside God the Father. And he leaves his disciples behind.

But, when Jesus leaves, he leaves in a different way than we might imagine. He doesn't take off and follow his own desires. He doesn't just float off into heaven and abandon the disciples. He doesn't get fed up with the world and leave us to our own devices.

No, instead Jesus leaves the world with a gift. Jesus doesn't just leave, but he **leaves** something behind. And there is no greater gift, than this Holy Spirit that Jesus shares with the world, that Spirit we're preparing to celebrate on Pentecost next Sunday.

So, when Jesus leaves us, he doesn't really leave us, but he leaves something of himself. This Holy Spirit shares the divine nature with Christ and God the Creator. This Holy Spirit



is a member of that holy trinity that we worship as God. Christ and the Spirit are one with the Father and so when Christ leaves us, he doesn't really even leave. For God is still with us.

When the Old Testament alludes to the Holy Spirit, they call it God's presence, God's face. They write that "The Spirit of God is God himself." They say that this gift Jesus leaves us when he ascends into the heavens is God's breath, the same breath that the Lord blew into Adam that gave him life.

The book we read the first few lines of today is called The Acts of The Apostles, but really it should be called the Acts of God's Holy Spirit, because it tells the story of how that Holy gift that Jesus left with us blew through the world to build churches, fill hearts, feed the hungry, save the lost, and bless the world with new life and a new way to live.

So, as we come to the end of the Easter Season, know that we live in the promise of Christ's resurrection forever. When Jesus left this world to ascend into heaven, he did not leave us behind, but left us with the gift of this Holy Spirit and a promise, that we will never be abandoned and will never be left on our own. So let us not be caught staring off into the heavens, wondering why Christ has gone, but let us be nourished and renewed by the Spirit of God amongst us. And though we may not be in the same room today, it is this Spirit that connects us all in Christ's grace, as one church, one body, all of us enlivened and encouraged by that Holy Spirit, who lives within us all.

Thanks be to God, and Amen!

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