

Mondovi: Our Savior's & Gilmanton United Methodist Churches

5.5. 2024, 6th Sunday of Easter, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.

Ascension Life and New Jerusalem

Luke 24:44-53

Let us pray (Pastor): Father God, we have gathered today because we long for you. Through your Word today, strengthen our faith and love for you and help us to live in the hope of the new heavens. In our Lord Christ Jesus' name. Amen.

How many days after Jesus' resurrection did he ascend into heaven? Forty days. This Thursday, May 9, marks 40 days since Easter, so today we're going to reflect on the Gospel of the Ascension.

Life is hard sometimes. There are times of sadness. But what do we Christians live by?

We live by faith. If faith is likened to a house, it's like the walls and roof that protect against the storms of life. If your house of faith is half-built or has holes in it, rain and wind will leak in.

In my sermon three weeks ago, I shared with you what Jesus did when he appeared to the disciples in a place in Jerusalem where they were gathered with the doors locked because they were afraid of the Jews. Jesus asked them if they had anything to eat to give them faith. They offered him a piece of broiled fish and he took it. By doing this, Jesus restored their faith.

To what extent was the disciples' faith restored? After Jesus blessed them and ascended into heaven, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, no longer afraid. Moreover, they went into the temple and continually praised God every day, even though the chief priests and Pharisees who had handed Jesus over to death and the Jewish crowd who had shouted for his crucifixion were still there in Jerusalem. How could they, who were locking the doors and holding their breath, make such a 180-degree turnaround, when they hadn't yet been anointed with the Holy Spirit of power from above?

In John 21, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into his disciples, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This Spirit becomes the indwelling Holy Spirit in them. Through the Holy Spirit, the disciples receive the resurrection life of Jesus. Also, through the faith raised by their encounter with the resurrected Jesus, they participate in the resurrection life of Jesus. Furthermore, they participate in the ascension life by seeing Jesus ascend into heaven. Are there different types of eternal life? You can think of it as having different roles. I may be a pastor here, but I'm a husband and father at home. In the same way, we can name eternal life according to what it brings us. The ascension life is the aspect of life that allows us to share in Jesus' ascension.

As disciples of Jesus, we too can enjoy ascension life through these words. Jesus dwells in our spirit through his Spirit. When Jesus died, he died with our old self; when he rose,

he rose with our new self; and when he ascended into heaven, he took us with him. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2:6, "... God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." This is possible because Jesus dwells in our spirit and we also in him through his Spirit. When we receive these words by faith, we can partake not only of resurrection life but also of ascension life.

Jerusalem, where their Lord suffered, was now the launching point for their mission of witnessing to Christ's suffering, resurrection, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Where we stumble and fail, where we lock our doors in fear, the risen Jesus comes to meet us, so that our adversity can be the starting point for new ministry. How does that happen?

Luke 24 shows us how Christians grow in faith: in the first event, the women search for the dead body of Jesus in the tomb, but when they don't find him, they encounter angels and are reminded of Jesus' words. In the second event, two disciples on the road to Emmaus meet Jesus, and their hearts are stirred when he reveals Scripture about himself on the road. When he breaks bread with them, they recognize him. In the third event, Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem and teaches them Scripture again. All three times, their faith is restored by realizing the Word.

Jesus tells his disciples, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (v. 44), and "open[s] their minds to understand the Scriptures" (v. 46). The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms refer to all of Scripture. The Lord doesn't want us to just read the Bible, but to find Christ in all of Scripture.

It's interesting that Jesus specifically mentioned the Psalms because they're a collection of hymns and prayers. We shouldn't just read the Bible intellectually, but we should enter into it in fellowship with the Lord, praising and praying to Him. One-third of the Psalms are laments. We can pour out our feelings to God as they are. We can encounter despair and wander without meaning and purpose in our lives. We can be overwhelmed with anxiety. When that happens, we can pour out our hearts to God in the Psalms. In times of despair, pray and praise. In times of worry, pray and give thanks in faith, and in times of concern, get into the Word of the Lord.

When we read the Bible, we need to be aware of who is enlightening us to Christ. It's not ourselves who enables us to recognize Christ in the Word. It's Christ dwelling within us. So, we need to read with prayer, asking him to help us. He can open our minds to recognize him. He can break the bread of life and give it to us so that our hearts can be healed and strengthened again. That's how we can restore our faith to enjoy ascension life.

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Jesus tells his disciples that everything written in the Bible about him "must be fulfilled," which means that every word of the Bible is not only fulfilled in history, but it must be fulfilled in our lives in Jesus today. We must go into the Bible, believing this. When we do so, whatever we realize and hold on to by faith is fulfilled for us.

After Jesus enlightens the disciples with the Word and commissions a ministry of witness, promising them the Holy Spirit who will be given to them from on high, he takes them to Bethany. There is spiritual significance here, too. Some interpret Bethany as the house of ripe figs, others as the house of the palm tree, which is a very fruitful tree. Either way, the idea is that Christ is leading them to a life of abundant fruit. On the other hand, Jesus is leading the disciples to Bethany, outside of Jerusalem, so that they can now go in and out of Jerusalem freely, not being afraid of it. Because the road to Bethany leads to Jericho, and then up to Galilee, they can take the gospel to the whole world. Jesus is showing them the road to evangelize. He's opening the way.

There, Jesus lifts up his hands, blesses his disciples, and is taken up into heaven. By ascending, Jesus has opened the way to heaven, and from the New Jerusalem, he continues to bless us.

The disciples were able to enter the temple in Jerusalem with joy because they saw the New Jerusalem coming beyond this visible city and believed that they were connected to the heavenly New Jerusalem. Also, they had a vision of that New Jerusalem extending through them to all the nations. So today, we too can have this ascension life that happened to the disciples. We can live a life of praising God in this fearful world of Jerusalem without fear and with great joy in the Lord, who is the true temple in which we've become a part of. Therefore, the life goal of Christians with ascension life is expanding the New Jerusalem.

As I was preparing this sermon, a friend of my family came to mind. She was on an evangelistic trip to Jerusalem at that moment. I'm going to share a little bit about her. She has the same name as my wife but it is spelled differently. She used to be a cardiologist in Boston, and now she's out of practice and travels around the world evangelizing once every couple of months or so. I think she picks a country and does a week-long evangelistic trip. Sometimes she goes with a team that includes her husband, and other times only with her little daughter. For places where the language is different, she reads people the gospel that she has prepared in their language beforehand. She also uses a translation app for communication. Her little daughter is involved in that as well. Everywhere she goes, she meets people who accept Jesus. She keeps in touch with some of them and follows up with them.

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This time she went to Israel with her daughter. They took a keyboard and an amplifier. They sang in the streets, displaying Hebrew gospel tracts and telling people about Jesus at Damascus Gate, Jaffa Gate, downtown Jerusalem, near the Western Wall, etc. She preached, "Your God has many names, Elohim, El Shaddai, and so on, but your God also has a humble name. It is Yeshua. The Almighty God Himself became the Passover Lamb. He did that because He wanted to enter into you to change your mind. For He knew you couldn't do it yourself." She then went on to name all the Old Testament prophets, giving them a short list of things that were going to happen. She texted us that, while some people were resistant to her work, some Orthodox Jews and Muslims were more open to the gospel than before, and many of them picked up the gospel tracts. She shared the gospel with a Muslim waiter at a restaurant near the Western Wall, who accepted the gospel within a minute. I'm going to show you some short video clips from the Jerusalem scenes, some of which were taken by her daughter Sharon. (video clips)

As you can see, they were able to go into Jerusalem and preach the gospel without fear. It's because they had the resurrection life and the ascension life with the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them. My friend's work gives us a good example of how the expansion of New Jerusalem is happening right now.

Old Jerusalem only had the Temple in the center, but New Jerusalem is the Temple throughout. The temple is *Bayit YHWH* in Hebrew, which means the house of the Lord. So, the temple is God's home. Just as the disciples worshiped the Lord and praised Him in the temple all the time, so we can be happy and joyful with the Lord in the temple, which can be our bodies, our homes, and our churches, as His dear children. This is the good news.

"Returned to Jerusalem with great joy": That's the conclusion of our lives. If any of us today were looking for something to put on our tombstone, that would be a beautiful final verse. Of course, we're not just using it as a tombstone verse, but may we live up to its words and return to New Jerusalem with great joy every day. Amen.

Let us pray (Pastor): Lord, who is the resurrection and the life, thank you for feeding us with the word of life today. Drive out fear, worry, and depression from our hearts and fill us with your resurrection and ascension life, so that the New Jerusalem where we always praise you may expand in our hearts and through us in our neighborhoods. May the joy of the glory of participating in this vision of yours well up within us day by day. In our Lord Jesus' name. Amen.